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EFFECT OF PRIOR EXPERIENCES ON
GRADE TWO READING ACHIEVEMENT

by



LILLIAN PROCTER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN
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ABSTRACT

This study examined parents' and children's perceptions of prior experiences and interactional patterns related to reading which may have influenced reading achievement. The sample of twelve Grade Two children from the same school were identified by their teachers on the basis of low and high reading achievement. The child sample consisted of six low reading achievers and six high reading achievers with equal numbers of boys and girls in each group. Information was gathered by the researcher using standard interview questionnaires, expanded from a survey of factors related to home environments of successful readers in previous studies. The children and their parents were interviewed on topics of general experiences and interests, circumstances related to the home environment, shared parent-child reading experiences and the attitudes of both parents and children toward reading.

The interview data suggest the environment plays a crucial role in stimulating and providing experiences relevant to the children's interests and abilities and in encouraging these interests. Whereas low reading achievers appeared to be less inquisitive and showed little interest in print, the high reading achievers were said to be persistent in gaining responses to questions and continue to show an interest in print material. Difference patterns between the experiences of low and high reading achievers the outstanding feature of the home environments of successful readers was the active

involvement of the parents and children in such areas as questioning and responding, book selection and shared book experiences with the following aims: to foster and stimulate interest in reading, broaden the child's knowledge base and foster independence in book selection. Other factors influencing the success of high reading achievers were play-school and library attendance, assistance of older siblings and parental attitudes toward reading. Parents of low reading achievers were less aware of their potential influence and were less involved in supporting early interest in reading or providing experiences to encourage the interest.

Recommendations for early programs encouraging parent involvement, school programs and suggestions for further research were made.

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CHAPTER ONE

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Introduction

An emphasis on literacy standards is increasingly evident as society recognizes that children must learn to read, in order that they may function adequately as adults. The varying rate at which young children acquire literacy has been an area of interest to parents, educators and researchers for many years. An area of utmost concern for all those who are involved with children is the obvious contrast in the manner in which children begin to read.

Why some children come to school and become high progress readers from the very beginning, seemingly without a great deal of help from the teacher, while others appear to be "at risk" from the start and find the task of learning to read inordinately difficult, despite considerable attention from the teacher, has been a problem for which only some of the answers have been found. (Doake, 1977, p. 1)

It can be said that children enter school with varying abilities and interests and that prior to this most children have had limited group experiences. Circumstances of the home environment and preschool experiences have a

profound influence on the developing child. Of course it is recognized that it is but one of a complexity of influences related to reading but the impact of the family must be considered.

The role of parents in facilitating a child's developing language and reading is "too often seen as one of acceptance of the offerings of the formal educational system or of 'preparing' the child for school" (Clark, 1976, p. 46). Smith (1971) emphasizes this point:

Two things are perhaps surprising about the skills and knowledge that a child brings with him when he is about to learn to read: the sheer quantity and complexity of his ability, and the small credit that he is usually given. (p. 223)

In terms of readiness Clark (1976) states:

It is important to consider not only the extent to which the child is ready for school but also the extent to which the teacher is ready to receive the child on the level at which he is functioning. (p. 4)

There is a need for increased interest in and awareness of the skills the child brings to the schooling situation and parents and educators must look to studies in this area to find out what is the best environment that can be provided for the child to develop in.

With the abundance of reading material available to children and parents it seems likely that most

children have had some reading experiences before they attend school. How are such reading materials used? What is the parents' role in guiding the use of available materials? What are the quality of the parent-child interactions with reading? How do reading experiences contribute to reading ability? Do the schools capitalize on the learning and growth that takes place before school?

Many studies of home environments focus on young capable readers. However, as Lindfors (1980) points out, "there are yet no firm answers and certainly no simple ones" (p. 181). Lindfors adds that it would be naive to hope for any clear answers at this point because the systematic study of environmental aspects is still fairly young and because of the "overwhelming complexity of language, of children, of the environment and the even greater complexity of relations among them" (p. 182). The same can be said of studies of reading development.

Perhaps one of the major contributions of studies of environments ... has been to raise better questions which in turn give rise to more focused study.

(Lindfors, 1980, p. 182).

Some studies point out that the preschool years are critical learning periods for children. Because children spend this time at home with their parents it is crucial to examine productive early reading and prereading experiences as well as general experiences to provide children with the

best possible learning environment. But studies of this kind must provide substantive practical answers beyond the cliché that reading to children is desirable. This is generally accepted but how and why is reading to children important? What other experiences related to parental attitudes and reading habits are also conducive to promoting success in reading?

It is important, however, to know why reading to children makes a difference because unless we can answer this question, we have little to guide us in determining how best to read to young children or in deciding what additional experiences we might provide to help children learn to read.

(Schickedanz, 1978, p. 48)

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this study to identify home environmental factors that influence reading achievement with particular attention to adult-child interactions. It was hoped that through comparing the home environments and experiences of high and low reading achievers it would be possible to identify possible patterns which might be used to develop guidelines for parents and educators for encouraging desirable climates for reading development and that could also be used for further research.

Statement of the Problem

Research has suggested certain experiences that

have aided the capable reader in his learning and specifically in his reading development. However, the particulars of the experiences are not yet stated and few comparisons of low and high reading achievers have been attempted. It is important to consider the early experiences with reading in the context of other experiences and attitudes about reading in the home.

There is a need to examine the range and characteristics of the preschool child's experiences with books in the home so that it may be determined how and why being exposed to books at a very early age seems to contribute in quite specific ways to the developing child's emergent reading behavior.
(Doake, 1977, p. 2)

The role of parents in providing prereading experiences and encouraging reading and questions about print as well as the nature and range of the interactions needs to be examined.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to see if any relationships exist between the children's reading achievement level and their reading experiences prior to attending school, within the context of related attitudes and experiences. As Doake (1977) suggests, this relationship may be "more pervasive than simply creating an all important interest in books and reading" (p. 14). This study was designed to assess the following aspects of these

experiences:

1. What circumstances related to home environment influences reading achievement?
2. What factors related to parent-child interactions influence reading achievement?
3. What are the characteristics of the preschool shared book experience which appear to contribute to the child's reading development?
4. Are there different home interaction patterns and attitudes evident between environments of high and low reading achievers?

Definitions

Shared book experience - refers to the situation when the child is read to by someone in the home or when the child reads to someone in the home.

High and Low Reading Achievers - those students identified by their teachers as having high or low reading achievement levels as compared to other students in the same school and further substantiated by scores on system-wide reading achievement tests.

Significance of the Study

Through the questioning of parents and children about early general experiences and specifically reading experiences, it was hoped to explore the differing experiences

of low and high reading achievers to determine if there was wide variance. The results might then be used to suggest methods of accommodating students displaying a range of interests and abilities. If differences were found the teachers could be encouraged to base the reading instruction on the child's individual expectations and background experiences. Also it may be appropriate to provide details of positive environments as guidelines and as a possible means of encouraging reading and making parents more aware of and more involved in the child's reading.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the following chapter selected literature and research is reviewed concerning reading readiness and a summary of environmental factors skilled early readers have been found to share will be presented.

Reading Readiness

In the past a persistent question in the area of beginning reading has centered on when a child can read or when reading instruction should begin. Since little is known about the cognitive processes early readers go through, theories of reading readiness have been based on child development information. Morphett and Washburne's study (1931) of first graders, based on the children's achievement as it related to mental age, led them to suggest that the age of six years and six months was the "best" time to begin reading instruction. Betts (1936) supported the idea that there is a developmental sequence to learning which renders futile, instruction in reading and writing before the child is six. Havighurst (1953) stated: "The eyes are not biologically 'ready' for reading in most cases before the sixth year" (p. 33).

In examining the question of when children should be taught to read, Doman (1964) and Delacato (1966) suggested that children have a neurological developmental pattern of learning to crawl, to creep and then to walk. If this sequence was interrupted, they claimed that the child might have difficulty learning to read. The last step in neurological development is laterality, or the dominance of one brain hemisphere, with both receptive and expressive language development depending on this. They stated that children have the potential to read when they have developed strong laterality (Sampson and Briggs, 1981).

Authorities such as the above, believed that attempting to teach reading before the first grade was useless, in fact, harmful (Furth and Wachs, 1974) because children did not have the required level of physical or cognitive maturity. Such notions are still evident in school enrollment practices using reading readiness tests which may focus on mental age, physical coordination and visual and auditory perception.

Krippner (1963) as a result of his case study of a young child of three who was already a fluent reader warned of the danger of predicting failure in reading because of deficiencies on reading readiness tests, particularly those requiring figure copying. According to the tests, this child would have been considered a poor risk for reading instruction. Torrey (1973) in her case study of an early fluent reader, a colored boy from a poor home says, "according to all

predictions, John should have reading problems all through his school career" (p. 147). Clark (1976) reported the background of a child who might have been considered "at risk" because of factors such as a difficult birth, early concussion and mixed-handedness, yet at the age of five had a reading age of eleven. Because it is not clear what constitutes "reading readiness" and because so many factors are involved, there is a variety of ever-changing readiness batteries.

Recent accounts of children who have learned to read before going to school have done much to attack the prevalent notions that a specified age is required for reading and that reading readiness skills must be taught. The focus of many studies has been on the young, capable reader. Some have dealt with the influence of home environmental factors related to early success in reading. Perhaps the most significant study of the relationship between home and parent involvement and reading was Durkin's study (1966). She conducted two longitudinal studies of children who had learned to read prior to attending school. The California study began in 1958 and involved assessment of a sample of 49 preschool readers over a six-year period, and 156 early readers were the subjects for her New York study which spanned from 1961 to 1964. She concluded that some children could and would read before going to school and that children differ greatly in potential and achievement.

In a review of studies of children who read early, Smethurst (1975) found no evidence of negative effects on children who learned to read early. A study by Hiebert (1981) illustrated that knowledge of concepts and skills related to print awareness increased significantly over the preschool period. Hiebert found that the early part of the preschool period, age three and four, was a particularly active time for print-related learning. The conclusion drawn was that children are capable of learning about print at an early age.

Some studies were also carried out to determine if early readers maintained an advantage over other students. In her studies Durkin found that the reading achievement of the children who read prior to school entry was higher than the achievement of equally intelligent children who were not preschool readers. Sutton (1969) in her longitudinal study of the impact of pre-first grade reading on children's later achievement, found that at the end of the third grade, the experimental subjects who had learned to read in kindergarten scored higher on reading achievement tests than two control groups who had not read in kindergarten. Similarly, King and Friesen (1972) identified 27 children who could read when they were in kindergarten. When compared to a control group at the end of the first grade, the experimental subjects performed at a higher level of achievement than the members of the control group.

Durkin (1974-75) conducted a follow-up study of the

children involved in the 1966 study. The reading achievement of the preschool readers exceeded that of the control group in each of the four grades she studied. However, she found statistically significant differences only in the first and second grades. She concluded that early reading was still educationally fruitful and what the study suggested is that "the likelihood of statistically significant leads (would be found) when instructional programs build on, rather than repeat what early readers have learned" (p. 58).

Chall (1977) stated that in the last ten years the question has changed from "is early reading beneficial" to "who should teach it (reading)". Although the notion still persists that a child learns best in school from a trained teacher, it is becoming an accepted fact that parents too are teachers of young children. Clark (1976) notes that families' contributions to the education of their children is little recognized and less respected and she indicates that there is need for more interest in, or awareness of, the skills that the child brings to the school situation, whether he is reading or not. "Education does not begin at five years of age, or indeed on entry in school" (Clark, 1976, p. 56).

A Right to Read bulletin, Parents as Models for Reading, deals with the heightened interest that educators have in parent involvement in reading instruction and build on the concept of parents as partners in the teaching of

reading:

Since teachers are professional educators trained and paid to teach and since materials are so plentiful today, one is tempted to ask why parents should be involved in the educational process. The reason, of course, is that, as research has shown time and time again, parents are the primary models for their children's behavior. Therefore, if parents are involved and concerned with educational matters, so their children will be. Many believe, in fact, that parent involvement is crucial to fostering willingness to read and guaranteeing success in the undertaking. (p. 1)

A comprehensive study of early readers by Clark (1976) of 32 children in England examined factors related to children who were reading fluently and with understanding when they started school at approximately five years of age. Further studies of early readers (Krippner, 1963; King and Friesen, 1972; Sutton, 1969; Torrey, 1973) have attempted to delineate factors which may have contributed to success in early reading.

Environmental Factors Associated with the Environment of Early Readers

As stated earlier, an increasing amount of research focuses on the capable reader (Clark, 1976; Goodman, 1970; Smith, 1971). Teale (1978) explains that "the better teachers understand what better readers do, the better they will be able to respond to the specific needs of the children they teacher and thereby guide them toward mature reading behavior"

(p. 922). The information presented is based on the findings of such studies; the major factors are based on those of Teale (1978). Although the points are listed separately, this is not to suggest that they are independent of one another.

Socio-Economic Status

Although higher sociometric levels of children have been positively correlated with children's readiness for reading and success in reading in the primary grades (Miller, 1970; Chomsky, 1972); Durkin (1966) and Clark (1976) found that the children who read early came from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Clark suggests from her study that it is crucial to explore the parents' perceptions of education and the support and experiences they provide by measures far more penetrating than social class, such as father's occupation or even education of the parents. Using a stratified socio-economic status measure to assess relative status of different ethnic groups and communities (high, medium and low rankings for each group), Flood (1975) attempted to find predictors of reading achievement. He concluded that "the failure to note any socio-economic differences was a unique result which seems to refute many of the findings of recent researchers" (p. 77). Social status indices:

represent a summation of the number of

symptoms or surface characteristics of the home environment, and studies using them yield little information about the particular ways in which specific environmental factors may influence the development of a child's reading performance.

(Koppenhaver, 1974, p. 125)

Palmer (1980) adds that many researchers have reached "cause and effect" conclusions which have been able to explain the failures but not the successes among children of low socio-economic status, most of whom do learn to read and write.

Availability and Range of Printed Material in the Environment

The materials and books which children have available to them for their own use seems to play an important role in a child's preparation for reading. This factor is evident in a large number of studies reviewed (Almy, 1949; Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Flood, 1975; King and Friesen, 1972; Krippner, 1963). Durkin (1966) comments on the "easy availability" of materials for children in her first study and the results of the New York study also indicate that those preschool readers had access to a wide range of reading materials, especially story books, Golden books and alphabet books. In Flood's study children who performed best on pre-reading measures were from homes in which the parents provided the greatest number of books and materials and had clearly established criteria for the selection of their children's books. King and Friesen (1972) who studied 31

early readers found that: "Almost all the children had access to easy reading material in the home. Some parents mentioned having extensive book collections for children" (p. 152).

Clark (1976) found that a prominent feature of her study was the important role played by the library in providing for and stimulating the interests of the children. "For most of these children the stimulus to use the library came initially from the parents though it was clear that the children themselves later found it a valuable source of information and enjoyment" (Clark, 1976, p. 103).

However the availability of printed material was not restricted to books. Clark (1976), Durkin (1966), Krippner (1963) and Torrey (1969) all cite the importance of everyday print in the children's reading development. Hiebert (1981) presented children aged three to five with print in context, signs on buildings, packages and road signs, and found that the preschoolers in her study were quite knowledgeable about print in their environment. A study by Smith (1976) involved filming at eye level, questioning and observing the reading awareness of a three and a half year old child in the naturalistic setting of a supermarket and a department store. Smith noted that children learn to read brand names on packages and road signs and are aided by seeing words in a meaningful context. Similarly, John the subject of Torrey's case study read labels on cans and words

found on television commercials. In a study (Krippner, 1963) of a boy who began to read at 18 months it was found that his early interest was sparked by a picture dictionary he received as a gift shortly after his first birthday.

However, he soon began to notice numbers, letters and words in his environment and requested that they be identified. At 18 months he looked at a bottle of medicine and said "V-I-C-K-S spells Vicks". From that time on he spelled out words and pronounced them. He became especially proficient at reading road signs when the family took Sunday afternoon drives.

(Krippner, 1963, p. 105)

Goodman and Goodman (1976) believe that reading actually begins when children "respond to meaningful printed symbols in a situational context with which they are familiar" (p. 12). Clark concludes:

Although these early reading experiences for some of the children were in books from which they had enjoyed stories, for some of the children the print in their immediate environment played an important role. This was particularly true of the boys who showed interest in sign-posts, car names, captions on television and names of products at the supermarket.

(1976, p. 51)

Children are exposed to a variety of print on material as diverse as books and packaging labels. An environment that affords the child an opportunity to develop interest by making different material available "makes learning to read a part of the general endeavor of comprehending

one's surroundings" (Teale, 1978, p. 126). What appears to be evident is that skilled readers do come to read through exposure to a variety of printed materials.

Reading is "done" in the Environment

Simply having books available as potential sources of reading was a factor most often found in conjunction with the child learning the function of print in the environment. Smith (1976) states that "children probably begin to read from the moment they become aware of print in any meaningful way" (p. 299). He implies that reading and responding to print in the environment is the way in which children come to realize the function of written language. The subject of Torrey's case study (1969) memorized television commercials and recited them as they appeared on the screen and taught himself to read with the aid of labels and by watching television. Carroll (1968) recommends that:

we can make more use of the practice of filling the child's environment with a full variety of printed stimuli, making sure however that they are also interpreted for the child. (p. 581)

Reading books or stories also serves to transmit to the child the relationship between function and form of printed language. Doake (1977) found that the outstanding characteristic of early readers, prior to going to school, is that they came from book-oriented homes and have been read to constantly. Huey (1908) states that "the secret of

it all lies in parents' reading aloud to and with the child" (p. 332).

Being read to also leads to a love for reading. Neil Nicholson (1979) asked 75 college students to write accounts of their early memories related to literature. Every student but one mentioned the pleasure of having been read to in early childhood. According to Clay (1972):

The most valuable preschool preparation for school learning is to love books and to know that there is a world of interesting ideas in them. Parents who love to share books with children transmit their feelings, their understandings and their language patterns to their little listeners. (p. 17)

As a result of a study of 36 avid readers in Grades Two, Four and Six, Cebuliak (1977, p. 206-207) concludes that:

The more interest and attention shown by parents to their children's reading habits, the more likely the children may be inclined to pursue those reading activities. Early parental involvement in the form of bedtime stories was universal in the cases of these avid readers.

The reading climate instilled by the parents at home should not be underestimated as being one of the most significant and powerful forces inducing reading activities in children.

A common finding also is that parents of early readers were readers themselves (Durkin, 1966; Krippner, 1963). Elkind (1974) says that:

emotional attachment to an adult who is a model

of reading behavior and who rewards the child's reading activities is of considerable importance in early reading. Learning to read is a dull and unrewarding task, and social motivation to please significant adults appears to be a necessary, if not a sufficient, factor in learning to read. (p. 14)

Schickedanz (1978) discounts such a behavioral explanation for the observed relationship between extensive story reading at home and later reading achievement. She says it stresses the importance of motivation and reinforcement derived externally from the learning act itself and assumes story reading serves as a preparation for the instruction that is to occur later in school. She prefers a cognitive explanation for the effects of story reading. In a cognitive explanation of learning, the learner is viewed as active, both in terms of motivation and construction of knowledge and the story reading situation itself is a source of data from which children construct knowledge about rules that govern the reading process. Reinforcement in the cognitive model, Schickedanz explains, is thought to be inherent in the act of information-processing itself. The child engages in activities not for the purpose of gaining external reinforcement, for example, praise, attention, or affection, but because he or she finds the activities interesting. In the development of letter-sound associations, those who read to children help by making the story line accessible to the child, pointing out words to the child, and then the child on his own matches letters

and sounds. Thus rereading of favorite and familiar stories serves to aid this process. Throughout this "unique interaction", Schickedanz interprets, the parent is responsive to the child's questioning and the child is actively involved by turning pages and learning stories by heart through successive readings. Schickedanz recommends that the child be able to see the print and be involved in turning the pages to assist him in learning the phrasing of the story. Clark (1976) cites the importance of reading and rereading familiar texts in helping young readers become "sensitized" to written language and giving them a means of understanding what the act of reading is all about.

Although many studies report that reading to and with a child are important experiences, as Doake (1977) points out "researchers have not explained the exponents of this obviously important learning experience" (p. 2).

A resulting behavior of rereading stories is the ability to memorize and then "read" them in a variety of situations. When the parents in Durkin's study (1966, p. 109) commented on their children's request to have a favorite story read repeatedly, they also mentioned the ease with which the children memorized the stories. Durkin records that one mother remarked, "After a while I didn't know whether he enjoyed the story, or enjoyed telling me when it was time to turn the page".

As a result of a study of 25 early readers, Gardner

(1969) found that repeated reading to children was a common feature and the child most often chose the book to be read.

Thirteen mothers commented that they were surprised by the way their children insisted on a favorite story over and over again. This I consider, is important. It was obvious that children learnt their story off by heart, anticipated the text, and began to identify words in print this way. I would speculate that it was not the breadth of experience of listening to stories that was important, nor the adult evaluation of what was a good or a bad story. It was the isolation by the child of a single piece of writing as the means for investigating our written code.

(Gardner, 1970, p. 20)

Although there are similarities between spoken and written language, and some cite comparable processes in learning both forms of language, others have noted the difference and suggest the child can become sensitized to the language of books by being read to. Teale (1978) states that written language is not simply a graphic means of depicting speech. He suggests that the primary difference between oral and written language is that written language is characterized by isolation from a situational context. As a result, the two modes of expression differ in vocabulary, syntax and the degree of explicitness. Sartre (1964) captures the essence of this difference as he recounts what happened when his mother first read to him.

I grew bewildered: who was talking? about what? and to whom? My mother had disappeared: not a smile or trace of complicity. I was an

exile. And then I did not recognize the language. Where did she get her confidence? After a moment, I realized: it was the book that was talking. (p. 33)

Clay (1972) notes that many preschoolers will "read" books by inventing the text. While absolute correctness of the text may not be the aim of reading at this stage, Clay suggests the child learns some of the following important concepts:

1. Print can be turned into speech.
2. There is a message recorded.
3. The picture is a rough guide to that message.
4. Some language units are more likely to occur than others.
5. There is a particular message, of particular words in a particular order.
6. Memory helps. (p. 29)

Clay adds further that at the stage of early reading behavior, this transition to "talking like a book" (p. 29) is a very important step in learning.

The Home Environment Facilitates Contact with Paper and Pencil

Although early involvement with printing is not mentioned in all studies (a result of study designs, Teale (1978) suggests), it is often included in the more detailed

studies. Torrey (1969) notes that the child in her study "enjoyed writing and spent much time printing words and numbers" (p. 551) at an early age and Durkin labelled many of the children in her study as "paper and pencil kids".

Almost without exception the starting point of curiosity about written language was an interest in scribbling and writing. From this developed interest in copying objects and letters of the alphabet. When a child was able to copy letters ... his almost inevitable request was, "Show me my name".
Durkin, 1966, p. 105)

Those in the Environment Should Respond to What the Child is Trying to Do

Teale (1978) explains this factor first discussed by Frank Smith as one difficult way to make reading easy: "The main emphasis here is on the quality of the interaction the child has with others in his/her everyday environment in regard to reading activities" (Teale, 1978, p. 929). The significant people in his life are genuinely concerned with aiding the child in his attempts to deal with written language; that they are willing to help with reading when it is needed and the way it is needed.

An environment that provides the children with many experiences for varied sensory and motor experiences is essential. So, too, is the presence of people who talk with (not to) the child; people who share these activities with children.
(Almy, 1966, p. 90)

Clay recommends that parents:

who respond with enthusiasm to the child's attempts to discover things about print for himself are providing a richer foundation for schooling than those who generate tension and stress as they instruct the child.
(1972, p. 19)

Yet Teale (1978) adds that it should be the child who determines the type and the amount of help needed. Prior to the child's going to school, the type of parental help most often given was not in actual instruction but rather in response to the child's questions about letters, words and reading (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; King and Friesen, 1972; Krippner, 1963; and Sutton, 1964). Durkin explains: "For the most part parents of early readers viewed the help they gave their children as a response to the children's questions" (p. 109) and Clark (1976) suggests this interaction was a "casual rather than systematic ... part of their daily life rather than something separate" (p. 53). Even in studies of deliberate attempts to teach reading to preschool children such as that of Soderberg (1971) the instruction was given in response to the child's interest.

In Almy's research (1949) of early reading experiences of 106 children prior to first grade, she found most of the children asked to be read to and attempts were made to teach the child to recognize words, letters or numbers that he saw around him "only because the child seemed interested and asked (p. 85)."

The importance of a responsive environment is most often stressed, but studies do not address the specific kinds

of interactions that took place. Guinaugh and Jester (1971) suggest that previous studies of interactions, specifically reading to the child:

used a simple criterion to judge the type of interaction between mother and child, either the mother read to the child or she did not ... This distinction is useful but the interaction between mother and child is more complicated than such a simple dichotomy. Simply because a mother reads to her children does not mean that the quality of the relationship is optimal for developing positive attitudes toward books and reading. If the child is forced to listen to his mother read, or if her mother views the process as a bother, then the interaction might be a negative rather than a positive influence in developing the child's attitudes toward reading and books. It is important that a distinction be made between quality and quantity.

Guinaugh & Jester, 1972, p. 171)

Furthermore a central issue in interaction studies should deal with the question of what prompted the interest in reading and being read to in the early readers. Was it perhaps that the interest and self-initiated questioning strategies displayed by the early readers was sparked by something the parents or others in the environment did? If poor readers had been provided with early exposure and opportunities to enjoy print material would they too have developed an interest and have displayed similar questioning about print in the environment? Gardner (1970) states that:

Unfortunately we know very little about the precise way in which advantaged pupils are prepared for reading by the natural events of their day-to-day life. We make general

assumptions that are covered by such imprecise guides as "They have a rich language background", "They are told stories", "They are read to by their parents", "They have stimulating experiences". (p. 18)

He adds that there is a need to examine the home regime with more precision.

Another debate in the field of reading related to interactions is whether reading is taught or whether children come to read naturally. It has been suggested that children learn to read on their own as they encounter print and have a need for understanding it, the same way and for the same reasons they learn to speak and listen.

Home environment has been related to the language development of children in numerous studies (Snow, 1972; Newport, 1977; Ferguson, 1977; Cross, 1977). In the studies of language interactions between parents and children a picture is emerging of an environment that shapes, responds to and interacts with (rather than directs) the language-learning child.

Studies of oral language acquisition focus on the components of learning whereas Doake (1977) says "in the field of reading acquisition the interest has been on teaching" (p. 39). Hoskisson (1975, p. 446) observes that perhaps one of education's greatest delusions is that we teach children to read". In 1908 Huey stated that:

children who learn by themselves ... grow into it as they learned to talk with no

special instruction or proposed methods
and usually such readers are the best
and most natural readers of all. (p. 329)

In the shared reading situation it is suggested that the child is presented with the printed and spoken word and he can pick out the forms he can interpret at that stage. Coots (1977) explained that by simply being read to the child is but a passive receiver but that ideally the child plays an active role in learning to read by seeking assistance in saying words or letters or having words printed for him.

Because the oral language code and the visual language code are similar in many respects some have assumed children learn the codes in similar ways. Coots (1977) states that a child can observe directly in the oral code in context with associated events. Both Coots (1977) and Palmer (1980) state that people reading to themselves do not exhibit "code-related behaviors". Palmer (1980) observes that a child learning to read "cannot see exactly what the reader is doing nor is it clear why the reader does what he does" (p. 14). Coots (1977) adds that the relationship between code and meaning is not immediate and public in the visual code communication and that the visual code is as dependent upon the "interpretation of concurrent environmental events" (p. 115) as the oral code and thus learning to read requires the sustained "direct assistance of a literate

person over a variety of instructional events" (p. 115).
He refers to these as "socio-instructional events".

Coots makes an important distinction between active and passive participation in learning to read.

In learning oral code the child must actively process both spoken language and concurrent environmental events and make the association between the two ... I suspect that the same level of active attention is necessary for establishment of their relationships.

(Coots, 1977, p. 118)

He adds that in both cases an actively involved "teacher" interacting with the child is vital and that a child cannot learn to read "on his own".

Whether or not a child learns to read "naturally" it appears he still needs considerable exposure to printed forms and the availability of an interested adult. It is not clear what the exact role of adults is in the child's learning to read.

Other Factors

The interaction with older siblings has been found to be a factor related to early reading. The studies of Durkin (1966) demonstrated that siblings help, especially in the form of "playing school", was most productive. She added that this could also depend on the age differences between a preschooler and the next older child: "The smaller the age difference, the greater the likelihood of sibling

help" (p. 136).

Flood (1975) found that viewing educational television and that monitoring of television viewing by parents were significant factors related to reading success.

Summary of Chapter Two

Recent studies indicate children are capable of learning about print at an early age and this notion is becoming more accepted. Some see the need for parents to be valued more as educators. Although some children can and do acquire considerable prereading and reading skills prior to school entry and early reading has been found to be productive to later reading, there is some question about whether these abilities are capitalized upon within the formal educational system.

Some of the factors associated with successful early readers include: availability of reading material, involvement in paper and pencil activities, shared book experiences and the availability of a responsive adult. However some questions remain unanswered. What is the role of the parent and the child in the acquisition of reading skills? What is the significance of the differentiation of active and passive roles in the interactions? How does this relate to reading readiness, that is what further factors may need to be considered?

Many of the previous studies focus on effects of acquisition or non-acquisition of early understandings rather than on how or why they come to be acquired. The early experiences of children vary and how children come to acquire reading skills and the exact components of the experiences have yet to be delineated.

A common feature of the studies reviewed is the call for further detailed studies. Hiebert (1981) states: "The effects of varying home and school experiences on pre-schoolers' print awareness remains a priority for future investigations" (p. 255). Coots (1977) concludes that:

Fine-grained analyses of home reading interactions between mother and child may be worth the cost and effort if they can help shed light on the "readiness" experiences that are effective in preparing children for classroom reading instruction. (p. 119-120)

It appears to be productive to compare children's experiences with respect to reading to provide a clearer picture of the parents' role in encouraging reading. As suggested by the literature, there is a need to discover more about children's early experiences with print and it is vital that educators become aware of the students' varying experiences and become involved in providing assistance where it is clear there may be deficiencies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND DESIGN

Design Choice

Because of the large number of environmental factors impinging on reading achievement and because the specific components of these experiences are not yet clear, case study methodology was selected for this study. Data was gathered through interviews to provide the basis for comparisons of parent-child interactions between students of high and low reading achievement levels. It was expected that analysis of the data would link known aspects of reading achievement, experiences and interests of the developing child with attitudes about print materials in the context of the home environment.

Case study approach is described as an explanation of "an instance in action" (Macdonald and Walker, 1975, p. 2) and the aim of case study is to add to "existing experiences and humanistic understanding" (Stake, 1978, p. 7). Case studies are characterized by complex descriptions involving "a myriad of not highly isolated variables" (Stake, 1978, p. 7) with comparisons being implicit rather than explicit. The case study method has been criticized for inherent

weaknesses such as low generalizability, however, Stake (1978) predicts:

... case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization. (p. 5)

Interview Questionnaire

The purpose of the interviews was to explore some of the factors related to home environment that might have influenced achievement in reading. By relating this to further experiences it was hoped that through interviews of children of high and low reading achievement levels and their parents, it would be possible to identify desirable environments for fostering reading development.

A tentative interview questionnaire was designed for use in interviewing the parents of the children in the study and from this the children's questions were developed. In order to provide a basis for comparison between parents and children's responses and between low and high reading groups, it appeared useful to establish a standard set of questions.

Selection of questions for the interviews was guided by a survey of some of the factors related to home environmental interactions presented in previous research (Almy, 1949; Cebuliak, 1977; Clark, 1976; Doake, 1977;

Durkin, 1966; Flood, 1975; Palmer, 1980). Guided by the general research questions, the interview questions were selected and expanded in order to gain as much information as possible related to general experiences, reading experiences as well as reading habits and attitudes toward reading.

In organizing the questions it gradually became evident that questions should be arranged so that respondents initially could freely mention relevant information (eg. 'What do you think might have encouraged your child to read?') but that responses be further guided by appropriate cues to stimulate responses in the area of the study's concern (eg. 'Did you or anyone else give the child preschool help with reading?'). Further questioning may have been necessary ('What kind of help was given?') and subsequent questions could then be based on individual responses. With a standard set of questions and the opportunity to expand on specific responses it was felt that considerable information could be gathered.

The parent interview questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first dealt with the background of the child and the family and asked questions about the age of the child, the number and ages of siblings, other adults in the household, as well as information about the length of time the family had lived in the community. These questions were usually asked at the end of the interview to

avoid making the session appear to be an investigation.

The second section was designed to indicate each parent's observations and perceptions of the child's early interests and activities. Questions related to parent-child interactions with printed material, such as reading a book together, as well as their perceptions of the factors that might have contributed to the child's awareness of the function of written language and the forms it takes.

In order to view early home interactional patterns with reading in the context of attitudes toward reading in the home, a third section tapped parental attitudes toward reading and providing preschool assistance with reading.

The child interview questionnaire was adapted from the parent interview to obtain information about the children's perceptions of the early assistance they had received in reading, their current interests and reading habits and their attitudes about print material in the home and in the school (see appendix for parent and child interview questionnaires).

As mentioned earlier, in both the parent and child interview schedules, the questions were set up so that broad, general ones appeared first, thus the parent and child was allowed to freely recall interests or experiences with reading. In subsequent questions, prompting by the researcher directed the respondent toward activities related to reading, eg. 'Did he ever use books, magazines, paper and pencils in

his play?'

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with a non-sample mother and child for the purpose of allowing the researcher practice in using the interview questionnaire, to ensure the clarity of the questions and as well to elicit responses that might suggest further questions.

Although only minor revisions were made, generally in the ordering of the questions to reduce repetition and some changes in rewording to make questions less confusing, it afforded the researcher an opportunity to become familiar with the questions. It was also evident that in a more informal, relaxed interview, more information would likely be elicited.

Subjects

The subjects for the study were Grade Two students from one elementary public school. This particular grade level was chosen because it seemed likely that a greater range of achievement levels would be apparent as compared to Grade One, while allowing less erosion of memory due to time when compared to children in later grades. Hopefully parents would be able to recall specific aspects of early reading experiences in their children also.

All of the Grade Two students had previously been

grouped according to reading achievement levels and spent their language arts time allotment in these groups. Classroom teachers were asked to supply an initial sample of 20 students, ten high reading achievers and ten low reading achievers. Reading achievement levels were further substantiated by achievement scores from system-wide reading tests of Grade Two students. From this initial sample teachers were asked to supply names of students who had been in the same school for both Grades One and Two and who lived with both their parents. It was hoped that this would at least partially control the group experiences allowing home environment to be the variable most likely to influence any differences.

The two groups were similar in age. The birthdates of the cases in the high reading achievement group spanned from April, 1973 to December, 1973 with an age range of seven years, six months to eight years, two months. The low achievement group spanned from February, 1973 to January, 1974 with an age range of seven years, five months to eight years, three months. The final sample consisted of 12 students, three boys and three girls coming from the low achievement group and three boys and three girls from the high achievement group. Both boys and girls were included to see if further comparisons could be made on the basis of sex differences.

The Cases

The subjects listed below have been code-named to preserve anonymity. Information about the background of each child has also been included.

Low Reading Achievers

Nina	Birthdate:	January, 1974
	Birth Order:	Middle child - sister age 10 brother age 5
	In Community:	9 years
Wendy	Birthdate:	February, 1973
	Birth Order:	Oldest - sister age 6
	In Community:	1½ years
Deanne	Birthdate:	June, 1973
	Birth Order:	Youngest - sister age 12
	In Community:	5 years
Eric	Birthdate:	May, 1973
	Birth Order:	Only child
	In Community:	5 years
Jeff	Birthdate:	August, 1973
	Birth Order:	Oldest - sister age 6
	In Community:	8 years
Nicholas	Birthdate:	February, 1973
	Birth Order:	Oldest - brother age 5
	In Community:	6 years

High Reading Achievers

Barb	Birthdate:	May, 1973
	Birth Order:	Youngest - brother age 11
	In Community:	6 years
Connie	Birthdate:	June, 1973
	Birth Order:	Youngest - brother age 10
	In Community:	10 years

Beth	Birthdate:	September, 1973
	Birth Order:	Only child
	In Community:	6 years
Carl	Birthdate:	December, 1973
	Birth Order:	Youngest - brother age 10
	In Community:	10 years
	Grandmother lived with family	1973-76
Samuel	Birthdate:	May, 1973
	Birth Order:	Youngest - brother age 10
	In Community:	10 years
Stewart	Birthdate:	April, 1973
	Birth Order:	Oldest - brother age 7
	In Community:	8 years

Procedure

Through the use of teacher information and standardized test results, two distinct groups were identified on the basis of reading achievement levels. Except for one child who had been at the school for a year and a half, those children identified by their teacher had spent two years within the present school, although several had also attended kindergarten there. Of these, six were male and six were female with equal numbers of boys and girls at each achievement level.

Letters were sent to the parents of the selected students explaining the nature of the study and asking permission to involve the child and asking for the parents' cooperation in the study. The parents were contacted individually by telephone to obtain tentative approval to interview the children and to establish a convenient

appointment time.

Each child was interviewed in the school outside the classroom, although not all children were interviewed in the same setting. A room designated for interviews was acquired; sometimes the principal's office was used and at other times a storage room. The interviews were conducted on two consecutive days and the average child-researcher interview lasted one half hour. The researcher opened the interview by asking about general play and television viewing experiences.

Parent interviews were conducted by the researcher within three weeks of the children being interviewed in the school. The parents were interviewed in their homes, usually when the children were not present, so that there would be less chance of interruptions. In most cases only the mother was interviewed because of their importance as significant others in the lives of their children and because the mothers were generally more available than the fathers for participating in the interviews at a time when the children were in school. Considerable information was provided by the fathers when they were included in the interview and their impressions are included where applicable. A cassette tape recorder was used to record the conversations with the parents and the children. In one case the family did not wish to be taped so the interviewer made brief notes during the interview. Generally the parent interviews required one hour to complete.

In each case parents were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to allow information to be used in the present study. To begin the interview the researcher explained to the parents what the study dealt with generally, and most often a set order of questioning was maintained for consistency in both the parent and child interviews. Open-ended discussion was encouraged.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The interview material provided considerable breadth, depth and variety of information about the experiences and attitudes of the children and their parents. Analysis of the data revealed some distinct differences between low and high reading achievers, some common facets across the cases as well as some unique features of each case. To facilitate understanding of the data, the information was considered across cases based on the general research questions posed to draw out patterns and provide a basis for comparison. However, emphasis and clarity seemed to be exhibited best by citing specific cases. The high reading achievement group consisted of three boys: Stewart, Samuel and Carl (all names in this study are pseudonyms); the three girls were: Connie, Barb and Beth. The low reading achievement group also included three boys: Jeff, Nicholas and Eric; the girls were: Nina, Deanne and Wendy. The corresponding data of the low and high reading achievers in this chapter is organized according to the questions originally set forth in Chapter One.

General Experiences

Following a brief description of the study, the interviewer opened the interview by giving parents the opportunity to mention anything they might have liked the child's first grade teacher to know about the child. This allowed them to voluntarily suggest aspects of the child's personality, physical or emotional development or accomplishments.

In the initial part of the interview following the introductory comments, parents were questioned about play-school and kindergarten experiences. The parents of children who had attended various playschools suggested it was basically a play setting and mentioned such activities as free play, games, projects, cooking, sing-songs and some letter identification. All of the playschools had at least some books available to them, usually described as picture books and children were read to on a regular basis.

Parents observed that kindergarten was more structured and provided more of the basic learning for Grade One. Activities in the kindergarten included letter identification, and some formal printing activities, being read to, drawing, crafts requiring fine motor skills, field trips as well as learning to dress themselves and tie shoe laces. Again books were readily available and those students who attended kindergarten in the school could sign books out of the library.

Parents were also asked about early interests and activities of their children to allow them to freely mention an interest in reading or books as well as to indicate general interests. Both children and parents were also questioned about the child's current interests and also both parents and children were asked specifically about reading experiences.

Low Reading Achievers

The introductory comments by the parents of the low reading achievers predominantly centered around the child's personality and emotional development. Children were generally described as "high-strung" or "excitable" and two parents indicated that they perceived their children to be quite immature prior to school entry. In both cases the children were compared to siblings. Jeff's father recognized that even now his son was immature for his age in contrast to the boy's younger sister who the father described as "too mature". Deanne's mother recalled her daughter was "extremely immature" and described uncooperative behavior and added this was a concern as her child entered school. Nicholas' mother mentioned she would have liked the teacher to be aware of her child's physical condition, as he had three operations before he was a year old.

Although playschool attendance is considered a valuable experience by some parents, only half of the six

low reading achievers had attended a playschool prior to kindergarten with the range in time being six months to two years. Jeff had been placed in a playschool because his mother was working and Deanne's mother indicated she felt her child needed social interaction with children her own age.

All of the low reading achievers had attended kindergarten. Eric, Nicholas and Nina attended the kindergarten in the school they presently attend. For Nicholas it was his second year of kindergarten as the first kindergarten teacher did not feel he was ready for Grade One.

The reasons for sending the children to kindergarten varied. In most cases parents regarded the socialization with children of similar ages as the primary benefit, although two parents also mentioned it was a good learning experience that prepared their children for school. Wendy's mother admitted she had been somewhat apprehensive about sending her child to kindergarten explaining that at that age they were very "young to be away from home".

According to their parents none of the low reading achievers showed a great deal of interest in print in its various forms or letters found in the environment before going to school. In a question where parents had the opportunity to freely mention interest in reading, none of the parents cited such an interest. Instead most children were said to generally enjoy outdoor play. The girls were

playing ball, swinging, and playing in the sandbox and indoor activities included coloring, dolls, lego, play dough, dress-up games and one girl played with an electric organ. Parents of the three boys recalled their sons enjoyed trucks and cars, one mentioned lego and one remembered her son climbing ropes and riding a tricycle. Nina's mother mentioned a prereading activity in which her daughter identified alphabet letters as something she felt the child had been interested in:

She played with blocks and also the alphabet numbers when she was about two. We used to play with the letters and we used to put them all down on the floor and then she would look at them and she'd know some of them and some of them she wouldn't remember.

When asked specifically if their children had used books, magazines or paper and pencils prior to play school, most observed that their children simply were not interested in books or other print material. Nina's mother added, "It usually ended up that I had to go into the room and pick out a book and say 'Okay let's read this book'". The other parents mentioned their children used books and magazines for drawing or coloring or cutting out of the catalogue rather than reading or printing. None of the parents mentioned reading activities as their child's primary interest prior to school, nor did they mention it as a current interest. Instead they all mentioned general outdoor activities such as soccer, biking, skipping, swimming, rollerskating and one

parent mentioned television viewing. Likewise the children themselves did not include reading activities as a favorite pastime but rather mentioned outdoor activities such as soccer, baseball, skipping and biking.

When questioned specifically about the current reading habits, four parents stated, (and the children agreed), that their children read very little. Again parents noted a lack of interest and a preference for outdoor play. Eric's mother said that especially in the warm weather her son was "too busy outside. I can't blame him". Eric himself remarked that he had other things to do. Others explained that if they did read it was only because they were asked to bring books home from school or "my mom says to". Although Nina could vocalize the benefits of reading she didn't always want to read. "It will get me to higher grades. It's good to read every day but I don't read every day". Deanne reasoned that because she had difficulty reading the words, she had trouble understanding the story, and therefore she did not read.

Two children said they read but Nicholas read only for a short time before bed. Jeff said he reads "because the book has things that you could learn". Wendy said she reads only when there is no one to play with or nothing else to do. Her parents agreed that she read very little.

Parents were asked about printing as another possible prereading activity. The parents of four children said their

sons or daughters were not interested in printing prior to school. For Nicholas, Eric and Deanne, paper and pencil activities were drawing and coloring rather than printing. Nina's mother said her daughter did not write much and that she "didn't have much to do with paper and pencil". She was the one child of the six low reading achievers who could not print her name before Grade One. Nicholas appeared to have considerable difficulty with motor skills and coordination. Jeff and Wendy's parents observed that their children did write and print before going to school.

According to their parents most of the children could recognize some letters of the alphabet prior to Grade One; two noted their children could recognize simple words but none were said to be reading stories.

The children were questioned about their reading accomplishments prior to school attendance. Nicholas and Deanne said they could not read before they went to school. Four children said they could read some words before Grade One. Deanne explained that she could not read because she had "started a little bit younger" in school, although her mother had stated that in contrast to an older sister, Deanne had been older than her classmates.

High Reading Achievers

Similarly parents of high reading achievers specified aspects of their children's personality most often

when asked what they might have liked their children's first grade teacher to know about them. Stewart and Beth's parents commented on the sensitivity of their children and the fact that they tended to take things very much "to heart" when criticized. Barb and Connie were described as being very outgoing and active. Some parents mentioned areas of concern such as talkativeness or aggressiveness. Educational aspects were mentioned in two instances. Samuel's mother stated she felt her son was certainly ready for school. Specifically in relation to reading, Barb's mother pointed out that her daughter did not read a great deal in contrast to an older brother.

All of the six high reading achievers went to playschool but for Beth this was instead of kindergarten. Again many parents mentioned the social benefits. Also some parents indicated their children were ready to participate in more structured activities beyond what they were doing at home. Stewart had been sent to playschool because he had a brother only 15 months younger and the mother expressed a need for individual attention. Because Barb's first language was not English, her mother perceived the kindergarten as beneficial in upgrading the English language before entering Grade One.

As for kindergarten most parents regarded it as a good readiness training for Grade One and in fact many parents considered it to be a part of the regular school program. One child, Stewart, attended the school's

bilingual kindergarten program and it was the opinion of his parents that learning a second language would be an asset.

To the question regarding play activities and objects, three of the parents indicated that their children liked books or being read to very much and Carl's mother specified that this was what her son had been most interested in before going to school. Carl also said that he "really liked it" because his mother was the "speaker" when he couldn't read. All of the parents of high reading achievers indicated their children did use books, magazines and paper and pencils prior to entering first grade in various ways including "scribbling", drawing and coloring. Beth's interest had been encouraged by art lessons. Two parents mentioned the influences of older siblings. Both had been assisted by an older brother and Connie's mother stated the older sibling "would try and help her (Connie) and she would try and print the letter". Carl's mother reflected upon the fact that her son always had note pads and that as soon as he could write his name, he was eager to begin printing the alphabet. She recalled Carl's brother would often try to teach him to print. Stewart's mother explained that her son used books in quiet time activities "when he would just go in his room and look at a book".

All of the children said they read a considerable amount on their own and this was substantiated by information

from the parent interviews. The children recalled a wide variety of reading material they enjoyed. When asked about the kinds of books they read on their own some noted general types: fiction, encyclopedias, fairy tales, myths and "big fat books". More specifically others mentioned Dr. Seuss, Charlie Brown Books, Owl Magazine, Richard Scarry Books, The Big Book of Stories and Serendipity Books. Connie, who said her hobby was reading and enjoyed reading books, explained she read a variety of different kinds of reading material including general story books and more specifically she mentioned Pippi Longstocking Books, Marmaduke Rides Again because it was funny, the children's section of the newspaper and letters students had written in school. She also mentioned that she liked reading to a student in school who "doesn't know how to read very well". She added that as well as reading before bed, she reads, "at breakfast and at lunch time or before we eat supper and afterwards". Samuel who was reading fairly advanced books specifically mentioned The Great Brain and The Westin Game as books he was currently reading.

All of the parents of the high reading achievers observed that their children had been involved in writing and printing before school "even if it was only scribbles, he was trying to write and recognize at an early age". All the children in this group were able to print and recognize their own names and four parents recalled their

children recognized the entire alphabet. Connie's mother indicated her daughter recognized about 80% of the alphabet and Barb's mother added that her daughter recognized only the capital letters.

All of the children were said to have recognized simple words such as "in", "to", "the", "a" and "cat". Two of the children, Beth and Carl, were reading some books before school, according to their parents, although Beth's mother said her daughter might have been reading from memory. Samuel's father mentioned his son learned to read at the "proper time" in Grade One. His son also said he could not read even small words before he attended school. The other children said they had been reading varying amounts. Most said they could read words and five said they were reading stories as well. Carl added that if he knew what the stories were about he might have been able to read them. Connie recalled, "When I was four I think I was reading some nursery rhymes and I was reading Snow White and my mom and dad were teaching me how to read when I was three".

Circumstances Related to Home Environment

The questions in this section attempted to probe the children's exposure to books. Parents were asked about the availability of books in the home and the child's role in selecting the books. Both parents and children were asked about library attendance.

All parents in both the low and high achievement groups mentioned that their children had at least some books available to them in the home. Nursery rhyme books and more specifically Dr. Seuss, Sesame Street and Disney books were most often mentioned. Two of the high reading achievers also had a variety of children's magazine subscriptions in their own name.

Low Reading Achievers

Five of the six low reading achievers did not select their own books and library attendance was limited. Independence in book selection was not fostered as in most cases parents chose the books they bought for their children, primarily because the parents did not feel their children were able to make appropriate choices. In one instance relatives had purchases "dictionaries, rhyme and picture books" for one child, Eric, and they also expressed concern about the child's inability to read. Although Deanne's mother stated she allowed her daughter to choose some books that the girl found interesting, for example the Sesame Street books, most of the books were selected by the mother. She perceived the books she purchased were more suitable for the child.

None of the children had been taken to the public library on a regular basis. Eric's mother sums up the general consensus: "I hadn't even thought about taking a

five or a four-year-old to the library and have him pick out books". Although Deanne had gone to the library with her sister, she added that she only went to look at the books but did not sign books out "because my sister said I didn't have time" to read them.

High Reading Achievers

The high reading achievement children were involved in their own book selection and they had considerable library exposure prior to school entry.

In most cases parents explained a combined or guided choice in selection of books to be purchased for the child.

Connie's mother summed up the general notion:

She (Connie) would pick them and we'd sit down and if they weren't very suitable, we'd tell her why and then we'd go back and help her. But we sort of gave her the choice to start with to see what she would do.

All of the children in this group except Beth were taken to the library on a regular basis, weekly or biweekly, prior to going to school. Barb's mother stated they first took her to the library at the age of two or three, although the remaining parents recalled beginning to take their children to the library around the age of four. Several parents mentioned taking the children to the story hour conducted by the library. Four of the six children still attend the public library with their parents although parents

mentioned they relied less on the public library as the children had access to the school library and because of the large numbers of books in the home. Samuel's father stated it was for these reasons they had not attended the library for approximately a year.

Carl's mother explained that the public library was where she was able to teach her children about books - "I brought them down to the library ... and made a point of introducing them, showing them the books, talking to them". She also encouraged responsible independent choices.

I let them choose their own books and Carl would choose some kind of outlandish ones sometimes and sometimes they weren't just what he thought they were. It seemed, at the beginning, he was taken with the cover and he will still come home from school with books which I think are a wee bit too advanced for him. However, I encouraged; still encourage him to read them.

Experiences Related to Parent-Child Interactions

Initially parents and children were asked to suggest shared family activities. Further questioning in this category attempted to elicit the parents' perceptions of their responses to the children's questions in general and questions about print specifically as well as their perceived role in encouraging the child to read. In the questions asked of the children, the interviewer sought to tap their perceptions of the help received at home and at school in relation to reading.

Low Reading Achievers

✓ When asked what things they like to do as a family, parents generally indicated outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, picnics, going for walks, as well as bowling and playing games. Children mentioned various activities: bowling, fishing, going to the park and the store, going to the movies, playing games, working in the garden and visiting grandparents.

Nina's mother mentioned reading books, however her daughter did not mention this as a shared activity. Rather she suggested going to MacDonald's or to the store or skipping; her parents sometimes turned the rope. Deanne noted reading books to her parents was a shared activity although the mother did not refer to it in response to this question; perhaps she did not perceive this as a shared activity.

Eric's father stated: "We don't do too much as a real family because I'm out of town alot". The mother added that Eric was "too interested in the other little kids" and that she herself "was too busy sitting in the sun".

None of the children in the low achievement group were seen as being particularly inquisitive and none asked questions about print in their environment.

Three parents said their children did not ask general questions. Nina's mother added that her daughter:

... pretended she knew ... she didn't really know but she wasn't the type to come out and say, "I don't know how this works".

Nicholas' mother mentioned her child would ask some questions when they were travelling and in response she would "explain them, talk to them". Eric's mother could only recall that he had asked questions about reproduction and was told "exactly what he wanted to know". He was not, however, asking questions about print. Some parents indicated that time did not always allow for adequate explanations.

None of the children seemed to be noticing road signs or store signs in their surroundings although Wendy's father mentioned that particularly outstanding colored signs would capture her attention. Although most parents thought their children's interest in numbers and letters did not develop until the children were in school, Nina and Nicholas' parents recalled that their children displayed an early interest in words and letters but that the interest had subsequently faded very quickly. Nina's mother explains, "I think she learned too young and then she thought, well I know it".

When asked if the children had asked questions about words or letters or numbers on packages or labels, all the parents said that they had not. Eric's mother sums up: "He couldn't have cared less". The questions children asked were most often in relation to the pictures rather than the words or letters, according to their parents.

Only Deanne and Nina's mothers mentioned limited attempts to teach the letters or "sounding out words" on

labels or packages, although both also mentioned that their children did not attend to these types of tasks and lost interest very quickly.

All of the parents of the low reading achievement group remarked that their children had learned the most about reading in school. When asked about the specific things that they themselves had done that might have encouraged their child to read, most mentioned buying books for the child, teaching the letters of the alphabet and only one mentioned that they read to the child (Deanne) and that her sister had read to her as well. Several parents said they did not become involved until the child was in school and saw the need for extra help or they had been requested specifically by the child's regular classroom teacher or resource room teacher to read to the child or have the child read to them. Some also mentioned they did not want to force the child as he did not appear to show an interest and others did not feel qualified to teach their child to read.

When asked about the assistance they had received at home with respect to reading, children mentioned help with spelling, saying and writing words. When asked why they received help, the majority opinion was so that they would know some words when they went to school. Wendy also mentioned this would help her with grocery shopping.

In response to the question "could you learn to read if you never went to school?" the children said they

would not be able to. Perhaps the reason for this attitude was that most of the subjects did not feel their parents played a very important role in teaching them to read.

Several of the children's perceptions about how their teachers helped them learn to read related to their current grade. Deanne and Eric felt that when they didn't understand something or couldn't say a word they would go to the teacher for help and Eric said he would sometimes ask his friends. Deanne said she could not read at the beginning of the year and that she stayed in at recess for extra help and added, "I sort of understand a little bit now".

After experiencing difficulty in Grade One, Nina remembered taking books home to read over the summer holidays to gain practice in reading. Wendy recalled "reading sheets" in school and Nicholas recollected the teachers "had these cards and they told me what the words were and then I know those words". Jeff consistently confused questions about reading with speaking and related the kinds of help he received from the speech therapist.

High Reading Achievers

Parents of high reading achievers like the parents of the low reading achievers most often mentioned outdoor activities as those predominantly shared with their children. These included swimming, biking, camping, winter sports,

baseball, soccer and going on picnics; several mentioned travel. Indoor activities included rollerskating, going to movies, playing board games and visiting the library.

Two children mentioned they like to talk with their parents about school or other experiences or impressions. Barb said, "sometimes we just have a little chat". Stewart explained:

I like to talk with them (his parents) and tell them how I feel and when I get home from school she (his mother) always has a snack prepared for me and I sort of talk when I'm eating but not when my mouth is full.

Card games and board games were mentioned by the children as shared activities as well as swimming, going to movies, bike riding and Connie mentioned they would just sit down together and "read a big book".

As a group the high reading achievers were perceived by the parents to be much more inquisitive. As a result parents remarked that in responding to the children's questions considerable interaction and explanation took place.

Beth's mother said that her child did not ask many questions but she added that her daughter had little need to as she was an excellent listener and picked things up quickly and was very aware of her environment. The mother recalled that both parents spent a considerable amount of time with Beth in providing assistance and explanations.

The rest of the parents indicated that their children were continually asking a "tremendous amount of questions" about "everything under the sun". Connie's mother felt her child "questioned everything". In response to the children's questions, the parents said they frequently explained and always tried to provide some sort of a reasonable reply. Carl's mother said that in response to her son's questions about words and letters:

I always tried to explain to him to the best of my ability exactly without trying to bring anything down to his level ...

Similarly Barb's mother remarked that even if they did not know all the answers to the questions the child asked, they tried their best to explain and when the child questioned having to do something, they provided reasons.

Stewart's mother used as an example a trip to the Maritimes in which her son was "constantly asking questions as we were travelling". In response they explained:

exactly what was going on, that we were over the Great Lakes or whatever. When we were on the airplane they were very anxious the first few times to know all about the safety instructions so we made sure that we explained that to them.

Samuel's mother could not recall any specific questions, however she noted it was the way their son asked questions that amazed them. They had noticed, as had others,

that he had an advanced vocabulary even at an early age. His father added they were astounded by his grasp of concepts as well. He recounted an incident that occurred the previous summer:

I was doing a job with tools ... and I said to him, "Would you like to be a plumber?" and he said, "No" and I kept working and he was passing me all the right tools at the right time which I didn't remark on to him but I was impressed by him and I said, "Well, why not; what would you rather do?" and this is his exact statement, "I'd rather work for a larger enterprise like Woodward's".

The mother explained that she and her husband "use a lot of words, we always explain. They (the children) always ask, 'What does that mean?'. Their son also asked questions that came up as he read. An example was, "What does the Middle Ages mean, dad?" and his father observed "he took the explanation, nodded and he went on reading". They also felt he picked up many words from television, for example, the word 'cooperation' from Sesame Street. Many parents mentioned their children learned a considerable amount of information, especially letters, words and numbers from watching programs such as Sesame Street and Electric Company.

Several parents noted that their children would not be satisfied with an incomplete response to questions they were asking. They were seen as inquisitive and persistent in gaining responses to questions. Parents also

encouraged questioning by providing reasonable responses. That is, by explaining rather than ignoring the children's questions, they were communicating to the children that further questions were welcome thus stimulating further questioning, and that this was a valid learning experience.

According to the parents, all of the children in the high reading achievement group were very aware of printed signs in their environment. Children asked questions about the meaning of various signs or asked parents to pronounce words for them. The parents of three children, Barb, Beth and Samuel, recalled that the interest in signs may have been stimulated by games they would play with the children while travelling in the car, for example, looking for letters of the alphabet sequentially in signs or car bingo.

Parents mentioned an early interest in letters and numbers. According to Connie's mother it seemed her daughter had this interest "right from day one almost". The influence of an older sibling was an important factor in several instances as well in encouraging this interest. Four of the high reading achievers had the benefit of old siblings providing direct help and indirect motivation. Although they were not asked specifically about sibling help, these four parents voluntarily mentioned the influence of older siblings. In all cases as the older child was learning, the younger child became involved. Samuel's father thought that an older brother might have been a model for the younger child.

Samuel said he became interested in books because his brother had pointed out some interesting ones. His father's comment is worth noting:

The younger kids have the benefit of two parents and a sort of part-time parent in the older kid.

A particularly interesting quote from Connie's mother described the help an older brother provided as the girl copied him during a reading activity:

She sat there and she'd hold the book upside down to start with but he would turn the book upright for her and when he'd turn a page, she'd turn a page. She'd sit and look at the pictures and she'd be looking at the words and she'd look over at his book and ask what it was about.

In the interview with Connie it was clear there was a warm relationship in the family as she mentioned her brother frequently; they played together and she was teaching him sign language which she had learned in Brownies.

Carl's mother recalled an older brother sitting down with Carl to teach him to write his name. Barb's mother felt her daughter tried very hard to compete with her older brother and this may have been a motivating factor in her learning to read.

These children seemed to be aware of and questioning print on packages and labels, most often on cereal boxes. When asked if they tried to teach their children words on

labels or packages, most parents said they did not consciously attempt to teach the children but provided explanations in response to their children's questions. Carl's mother stated she would often correct him if he did not pronounce a word correctly as he was reading the packages and she commented that she still does this, although he reads very well. Stewart's mother noted that her son "certainly did learn to recognize words from these (milk carton and cereal boxes)". She explains:

He used to try and read them because of course there's often a prize involved ... as soon as we got a new cereal box they were at it and wanted to know what's in it or what you can get from it.

Several parents noted that because of the differing methods of teaching reading and the fact that they did not feel qualified to teach reading, they did not set out in any structured way to instruct their child to read. In this respect parents of low and high reading achievers had similar feelings.

Parents provided many examples of experiences that might have encouraged their child to read. They most often mentioned the fact that the children had been read to and this stimulated an interest in reading and through this the children were encouraged to read on their own. Three parents mentioned that the child himself was curious about printed forms and that books, magazines and in Beth's case, kits were

available in the home. Several also recalled that they explained a considerable amount to their children, not only in relation to reading but in other areas as well. The fact that they themselves read, many parents thought, set an example for their children. Others cited the local library and older siblings as important factors in the children's success in reading. When asked who they thought taught their child the most about reading, without specifying whether this was in the home or at school, three parents said that it was the school, two said the mother and one said the father was the most influential factor.

The high reading achievers most often explained that the parents helped them to sound out words and that they were "taught words". Connie recalled:

Well first she'd read to me a sentence or page, then I'd have to read it back to her. Sometimes she'd write a word down and I'd have to say it or she'd write a sentence or something down and I'd have to say it.

When asked why they thought help was given at home in reading, most felt that it was a readiness for school. Stewart thought his mother had helped him because she wanted him to be an "excellent reader" and Samuel though he was helped so that he could have "more fun reading".

Stewart said he could learn to read at home. He described how this could be accomplished:

My mother would teach me how to pronounce (words). Later on when I was about 5 or 6 or 7 or something, she'd teach me how to pronounce the words and then she'd tell me the words and then she'd tell me to repeat the words after her so I'd begin to learn ...

The other five children thought they could not learn to read if they did not come to school but the comments of four of these children indicate school extended what they had already learned at home. This is best summed up by Connie's statement: "I learned most of it at home but some in school".

Most of the children said they could read upon school entry and three children explained how they had been taught in school. Two children mentioned they learned words. Carl said, "They give words and they asked us, and we'd put up our hand and see if it's the right answer". Samuel said they had been helped "with reading and telling us some words we couldn't get, remembering them and stuff". Stewart's comments about how his first grade teacher helped him read are of interest:

She (the teacher) said the secret about reading is to pronounce and then I gave it a go (referring to the printed word). It said 'something' so I said 'ss-uh-mm-th-ing', 'some-thing', 'something'! It said 'something'.

Shared Book Experiences

The questions in this section dealt with particular features of the shared book experience. If it had been established that parents read to their children, they were

asked who read to the child, the kinds of books that were read and who selected the book for reading. The children were also asked similar questions. As well parents were questioned about the involvement of both the reader and the child in the shared book experience.

Low Reading Achievers

Only three of the six parents of the low reading achievement group said they read to their children prior to school entry. In these cases the child was not actively involved in the reading situation but rather was most often seen to be what could be described as a passive listener.

Three parents indicated either no reading or very limited preschool reading. Again they stated that the child did not appear to be interested in being read to. The comments of the parents who essentially did not read to their children and those of their children are certainly noteworthy.

Wendy's parents stated they did not read to their daughter before she attended school, nor did they read to her once she began "because she wasn't interested". Her father said he would sometimes tell her stories but the mother added that the girl "wasn't even listening; she was there but, playing with something else". Once she was in school a young friend helped her with reading and both Wendy and her parents said the babysitter read to her on occasion.

Wendy was asked if she would have like to be read to more. Her response was, "Yes, I really like it", because she was able to fall asleep easily.

Nicholas' and Eric's parents indicated they began to do some reading when their children were in Grade One because they or relatives perceived a problem with reading or they had been requested to do so by the teacher.

Eric's parents said specifically that they "hadn't made a point with him of trying to read anything". The father offered: "We really haven't done that much. We were kind of hoping that Sesame Street would look after that for us". The mother's comments are interesting. She explained that she had never been very forceful about reading and that she had talked to her son's teacher about it:

I felt guilty for not reading to Eric. I thought that was why he wasn't doing very well in school as far as reading went and she said no don't worry about that because with some kids, it just takes a little longer to learn.

The parents also mentioned that although they do not read to Eric now, once the child started kindergarten, they read some "because we thought it would help. We thought it was about time".

We tried but the thing is you cannot force a child and we've sat down lately and read and really he's got all sorts of books to read but he's just not interested. We figure if he

wants to do it, he'll do it; it's the only way he's going to learn, that may be a poor attitude. (Eric's mother)

When Eric's parents said they did not read to their son before he went to school they were asked about his involvement in the reading situation once he was in school. Both parents stated that Eric did not ask to be read to and "he listened for a while and after that it would go through one ear and out the other; he's busy watching T.V. or thinking of something else to do". Eric's parents added that if he was looking on, his attention would have been focused on the pictures rather than the print. His mother recalled how he sometimes pretended to read in his room when he was younger although the father said he had not noticed it. When asked if he had become involved to the point of turning pages, his mother replied that he had but only to hurry them along to finish the story.

Eric said his parents did read to him somewhat when he was younger mostly at bedtime and that the parents picked the story to read. He also said he enjoyed being read to sometimes because "then you'd see fun parts". When asked if he wanted them to read more now, his reply was "I didn't, don't want them to read more" and that he did not ask them to read. When questioned as to why he thought they read to him, he responded that it was to "let me learn". He also said he reads to them at times because they ask him to.

Nicholas' parents said that a babysitter read to

him before bed on occasion. They, or in this case the mother, had not read to Nicholas, however, until he was in school. When asked why they read to their child now, they said they thought it helped to read and that the Grade One teacher had asked them to read. The books being read were ones the child brought home for the purpose of shared reading.

Again, although Nicholas' parents did not read to him before school attendance, they were asked to elicit information about the child's involvement in the shared book experience. Both mother and child chose some books to be read and he did ask for books to be reread. Again they thought Nicholas would have focused on the pictures. The mother recalled that she would read the story through but did not make explanations, ask questions or review or reread any parts of the story. When asked if there had been any introductory discussion before reading the story, the father did not see how this could be possible. They noted some discussion after reading as a comprehension check.

Nicholas said his mother read to him only before bed and when he was asked if he wished she would read more he simply replied, "No". He agreed that his mother picked the stories to be read. He said he reads some library books to his mother and she would help him with some of the words but that they never talked about the story.

In summary, these three families of low reading achievers had virtually no preschool reading to the child and even when parents did read once the child was in school,

it was not initiated in the family but rather from the school or outside pressures. This might also have had some effect on the child's attitude toward reading. An interesting note is that the children said they liked to have stories read to them.

Jeff's mother stated on three separate occasions that she did not provide any preschool help with reading yet she did say she read to her son when he was younger. Perhaps she did not perceive this to be a form of assistance. This appears to be borne out by her response to a question about the relationship between reading to a child and his own reading. She did not feel reading to her son would necessarily affect his own reading and added that she read to him only because of the enjoyment that he would derive from it.

The three parents who did read to their children did so because their children seemed to enjoy being read to and Nina's mother added that "if you read, they're going to catch on to words and pronunciation". Although it is not clear when they stopped reading to their children, none of the parents still read to their children. Two of the children, Nina and Jeff, had taken the parents' role in reading to younger siblings.

Some parents explained that they simply did not have the time to read to their children. Deanne's mother stated:

... even now we would be willing to read to her; we've kind of slacked off the last little while because (of the) time element, which is no excuse ... I feel guilty about not doing that anymore and I know it's something that we should do because she just loves sitting down and being read to.

Jeff and Deanne's parents, who did read to their children said both mother and father did the reading, however, Nina's mother recalled that only she read to her daughter. Of the three parents who did read to their children, Jeff and Deanne's said that both parents and children chose the books. Nina's mother chose the books she read to her daughter. All of the children asked to have books reread: two parents recalled specific titles, Pinocchio and Green Eggs and Ham.

Deanne's mother explained that their daughter's resource room teacher recommended that books be reread several times, with Deanne herself reading some after the first reading. The mother mentioned that she was amazed at how much better she could do a second time.

The children in this group appeared to be focusing their attention on the pictures rather than the print, in fact, Deanne's mother encouraged her daughter to choose books with prominent illustrations "so she could see what's going on and focus on that". The mother said Deanne still likes to examine the pictures before she starts reading a book.

When asked if they stopped for any purpose while

reading, to allow for questions or explanations, Jeff's mother said she would sometimes stop to allow him to examine the pictures. Deanne's mother said her daughter would ask questions as the story was being read. Nina's mother asked questions to see if her daughter was following along.

The parents were asked specifically if they had made any explanations in the shared book situation. Nina's mother could not recall having made any. Deanne's mother said she explained in response to her daughter's specific questions about the story; Jeff's mother said she explained when her son did not understand the story. Discussion took place if the parents felt the child did not understand the story or when the child could not answer comprehension check questions. Jeff's mother said she would do this upon completion of the story at times and Deanne's mother said they might ask her to retell the story. Nina's mother recalled asking her how she felt about the story.

Two parents said they had reread parts of stories on occasion. Deanne's mother read if her daughter asked her to reread a particularly humorous line in the dialogue. Nina's mother added:

If I'd asked her a questions and she didn't know then I'd reread it to her and say, "Well here, this is the answer for your question".

Two children of the six who were read to, Deanne

and Jeff, memorized parts of stories while Nina had not. Jeff and Deanne also turned pages but did not appear to be aware of the words as the page-turning was not always synchronized with the story. All three seemed to have pretended they were reading when they were much younger, using their own books.

Deanne's mother commented that although they read to their daughter quite extensively, and had anticipated this would have an impact on her reading ability, that this did not appear to influence her own reading or her school reading. This was probably because, as the mother observed, for her daughter this was a form of entertainment but that she did not view it as a learning experience. The mother indicated she thought laziness was Deanne's major fault. Deanne's comments are of interest: When asked if she liked to have someone read to her she replied:

Well --- some of the times cause when I get stuck on a word in my reader I say, "Mommy this page is too hard, can you pretty please read it?" and she said, "If you get stuck on a few more words, I'll read it to you".

Nina's mother indicated and her daughter agreed that she enjoyed being read to but that she does not read much on her own now.

All three children whose parents said they had read to them agreed they had been read to when they were younger and that they did enjoy it then. When asked (

if he likes to be read to now, Jeff replied, "Not too much because me and my sister have to sit on these little chairs. They're not too comfortable". Deanne explained that she "solved some words" as her mother was reading and "got better". She explained she liked being read to because she liked listening to stories and fairy tales she had never heard before - "It was just nice". Nina like being read to:

because then I could go to sleep anytime
I wanted to and they would keep reading
till they got sleepy.

The children mentioned that the parents read such things as: fairy tales, horse and farm story picture books, mysteries of "bad guys" and books on how to take care of birds. Nina and Deanne said their parents picked the stories. In response to the question "Did your parents read as much as you liked or did you wish they would have read more?", Jeff and Deanne said their parents read as much as they wanted them to and Nina commented, "I wish they could stop at a certain time when I want to play". When asked why they thought their parents read to them, Jeff and Deanne thought it was because they asked to be read to. Nina thought her parents read, "cause they like reading books and then I'll get up into higher grades". All three read to their parents somewhat. Nina read to her brother as well and Jeff said he read to his parents on occasion "because my parents want to hear me read".

Most often the low reading achievers who had been read to focused on the pictures but this was seldom extended to interaction with the print.

High Reading Achievers

As a group the high reading achievers enjoyed being read to from an early age and were more actively involved in the reading situation.

In four families both parents read to the children but in two cases the mothers were said to have done more reading than the fathers. According to the parents, all children enjoyed reading and asked to be read to. A variety of books were used from both home and library.

An interesting feature of the shared book experience expressed by the parents was that it established a relationship between them and the child. It was a time they could spend with their children and a time they themselves enjoyed. Their interest in reading was perhaps passed on to the children. The comments of Connie's mother are worth noting because they express the warmth and sensitivity all the parents of high reading achievers seemed to generate:

I first started it (reading to Connie) because it would be sort of a quiet time when we would sit and I'd hold her and she just seemed to enjoy it ... I just think it's nice to sit and read to sort of have your sharing time or teach, not teach them per se but just sort of something that you do together ... sort of introduce them to new things. I

think that was one way of doing it. Sometimes if you got too involved in your other things you sort of come down to their level if you want to and could share something with them that they could understand.

Carl's mother said "we both enjoyed it very much". Samuel's mother thought reading to their children came quite naturally because books were such an important part of their lives. She added:

We used to read, like I can remember on rainy days ... we would pull up the chair to the fireplace, light a fire and we would sit there and I would just read, as well as at bedtime, so they got quite a bit of reading.

The father added that because they (the parents) loved books they also wanted to get their children to enjoy reading. Most parents said they read to their children several times during the day but all mentioned that bedtime reading was almost a "nightly ritual".

Parents were asked if they felt reading to their children may have some effect on the child's reading. All felt that it certainly introduced them and got them into reading books and that it encouraged them to read on their own. Stewart's mother seemed to sum it up:

I think it's like alot of other things; if they aren't exposed to it then they really aren't going to do it themselves.

Three parents alluded to the educational value with statements like - "you learn alot from reading", "reading is what you base your education on", and "it's one of the most educational things you could do, no matter how old you are".

Four of the six parents of high reading achievers said they still read to their children and even though the children could read on their own, they still appeared to enjoy it. Two were avid, independent readers. The parents of the child with the highest achievement score (Samuel) who was reading very advanced books, said, "We don't have to (read to the children) when they can do it themselves". Beth's mother said she reads very little now because her daughter wants to read to her.

All children chose the books being read to them, although Samuel's mother said she chose some of the books. Connie's mother mentioned a situation where she herself chose three or four books and the child narrowed it down, however, at bedtime Connie chose the book to be read:

Bedtime seemed to be the time that she
like to settle down with her old
favorites and go to sleep.

All of the six children were said to ask for books to be reread often. Parents indicated that at varying times there would be one book that was very popular. Samuel's father added, "I got my own favorites after a while".

All of the high reading achievers were able to see

the pictures and the print as their parents read, often they sat next to each other. Connie and Barb's mothers mentioned specifically that they would hold the child on their lap as they read and Beth's mother said "we always laid on the bed so she could turn the pages".

Parents were asked if they stopped at any point in their reading to allow free mention of questioning by parent or child or any explanations. Three parents said they would stop to respond to questions the child was asking, four said they themselves would ask questions and often discussed or explained things the child did not understand; two recalled how they would stop to discuss the pictures. Barb's mother commented that she learned the questioning technique from the playschool teacher. Samuel's father said he often pantomimes while he reads to his children.

All parents said they provided explanations in response to the child's questions or when the children said they did not understand. Three parents recollected having an introductory discussion of the picture on the cover, the title, the author and what the story might be about. The general feeling was summed up by Carl's mother:

I was trying to teach them that it was important to know the title of the book and who wrote it.

Connie's mother remembered that after the preliminary discussion "very often before you even got two words past

the title, she'd go, 'What does that mean?'. All the children were actively involved in the story and were said to be asking questions about the stories and the pictures. Parents felt that initially the focus of attention was the pictures but they noticed that later the children also focused to some extent on the print as well and were asking questions about words and letters. In some cases they were asking about word meanings and also asking for words to be pronounced. In Connie's case, the mother commented:

If she saw a great big, long word she'd ask what it was. She liked the long ones.

Samuel had several books with English scrolled letters and his mother recalled how he picked these out and appeared to know where a certain story was going to begin just from this. Stewart was said to have recognized some words and related them to other stories.

Once the children became more familiar with their books, they would actively follow along and help out with some of the words. Several parents mentioned that they would be promptly corrected if they missed a word or read a word incorrectly. Carl's mother recalled that even if her son could not read in the early stages, he knew the stories "by heart" and could almost point to a word she was reading. Similarly, Beth's mother felt her daughter "knew the story as well as I did but she would still sit

there glued to the book".

All of the parents of the high reading achievers recalled some degree of pointing to the print by the child or the parent. Samuel's father said:

I deliberately read to him with my finger and followed the words. I just thought that somehow at least that if I pointed to them often enough that it would do some good.

Although they did not elaborate, parents mentioned some discussion subsequent to reading the story, although they thought most discussion took place during the reading of the story. All the children helped to turn pages.

Three parents remembered reviewing or rereading parts of the stories when their children requested it. Another interesting comment was put forth:

... we'd be going through and she'd be asking all these questions and then we'd get through the book and she'd say, "Read it again now that I can listen to it better". So then we would go over it again and she would just sit there and listen to it ... and that would just seem to satisfy her. (Connie's mother)

According to their parents all of the children memorized parts of stories or complete stories before they went to school as a result of having stories read repeatedly. They had also pretended they were reading as youngsters using both childrens' and adult books. One child still does this with Time magazine.

All of the six high reading achievers said they enjoyed being read to when they were younger. Three mentioned that both the mother and father had read to them and two said their mother had read to them. The children remembered some of the following had been read to them: short stories generally, nursery rhymes, fables, Snow White, Cinderella, Charlie Brown books, and Rupert the Bear books. Four said they picked the stories, and two said both they and their parents would choose. When asked if they read as much as they liked, four said their parents read a considerable amount and that they had been satisfied. Two said they wished their parents had read even more.

The comments about why they like to be read to are of interest. Two said they enjoyed the way the parents read. Specifically Beth said she does not know how to read the way her mother does. Along the same lines Samuel pointed out:

When they (his parents) read they know where your voice goes up or down and when it stops and when it slows down for commas and they read nice.

Carl said when he was young and could not read his mother "was like a speaker" for him as he studied the pictures. Stewart liked listening

because you don't have to read to yourself and your brain doesn't have to tell you which word it is ... and it gives your brain a real workout.

He expressed his pleasure in his mother's willingness to read: "She reads to me when I want her to. I like her; she's a nice parent".

When asked why they thought their parents read to them, two could not reply but of the remaining four, three thought it was because the children liked it and asked to be read to. Stewart said it would help later:

Well it would help you when you're in grades to read so you could learn words. When I was little she (the mother) used to just point out the word to me and tell me to say it and I'd always say it wrong. She'd say it right and then I'd catch on to it.

Reading Habits and Reading Attitudes of Parents

Parents were questioned about their own reading habits and their attitudes toward reading and television viewing. As well, their perceptions regarding providing preschool assistance with reading were solicited.

Parents of Low Reading Achievers

Although none of the fathers were said to read very much, all of the mothers except Nina's said they read mostly for enjoyment, and Eric's mother mentioned she read to pass the time. All felt that reading was important although the time factor was often mentioned. Nina and Eric said that they wished they could read more and Eric's father added that it was not until later in life that we realize

how important reading is. Five of the six parents also felt that reading was losing its importance because information could be gained in other ways. Deanne's mother thought more people were starting to read again because of the variety and numbers of books available. She herself remarked that she would rather read than watch television.

As a group the parents of the low reading achievers did not feel they should provide preschool help with reading because they did not feel qualified. Some also mentioned it depended on the maturity of the child and whether they were asking questions about print.

Parents were asked if they had any rules restricting television viewing. Two parents, Jeff and Eric's indicated they did not have any such restrictions. The other four parents said that they either restricted the amount of time spent watching television or the kind of programs their children watch, such as violent ones. Others mentioned the poor quality of programming and the large numbers of repeats. In preference parents remarked that they would like to see their children have other interests.

Parents of High Reading Achievers

All parents of the high reading achievers read a considerable amount although in some cases one parent read more than the other. Some also mentioned that time was a factor and they wished they could read more. They indicated

they read for both enjoyment and learning. They mentioned exploring a wide range of reading materials including general fiction, historical fiction and informational books.

All parents concurred that reading was most important to maintain knowledge although one thought people read less because they have alternate means of obtaining information. Samuel's father viewed reading as a freedom and thought that was the only way one could be discerning. With limited television and radio programming he explained we cannot control the propaganda but "nobody can stop me going over (to the bookshelf) and picking up Shakespeare and that's what I think is important about reading".

When asked if they thought reading might lose its importance several mentioned that for some people reading would be less important but that for themselves reading had a special significance and that others had similar feelings. These feelings are likely summed up by the following quote from Carl's mother:

I think there will always be people who love reading and there will be people who write books. You see to listen to a record will never satisfy me the same as having a book in my hand that if I want to check back on something I can do it. I have to have a book right in my hand and I think there will always be people like me.

Several other comments are of interest. Connie's mother thought "somebody's got to read". Barb's mother thought that an important aspect of reading was that, unlike

television, one could become emotionally involved in a story. In a similar vein Stewart's mother compared reading and television viewing.

I still think that you can learn an awful lot from reading that you're really not going to get very successfully in any other way. Sure through television and so on you learn but still I think in order to probably broaden your vocabulary, that sort of thing you're certainly not going to get from television. If you're not reading and you're not viewing the written word you're not going to pick that up.

When asked their thoughts about providing pre-school help with reading, the parents interpreted the assistance in various ways. Beth's mother expressed the notion that the earlier a child is taught to read, the easier it is for them. She added that if they get into a habit of reading, they will continue reading probably more so than somebody that did not read when they were a small child.

Carl's mother explained that parents "should always encourage talking to them and asking questions". Barb's mother commented that she felt it aided the child's development and that although it depended on the child, parents should make an honest attempt to try to read to them. She added that it promoted the relationship between parent and child.

The other parents felt they and others should provide help but qualified their statements in differing

manners. Samuel's father did not feel "the mechanics of reading" should be belaboured and added he would not even attempt to interfere with the teacher's instruction. The mother, who is a teacher, also had strong feelings on the subject of teaching the skills of reading to a preschooler:

I really am dead set against teaching a child because at that level I don't think most four or five-year-olds are ready and I think it would be too frustrating if you force it on them.

However, both thought parents in general could certainly be involved in readiness tasks and could expose the children to a wealth of experiences.

Connie's mother said she felt there was value in providing preschool help with reading but not in a structured way. She explained how the playschool teacher had told parents specifically not to teach their children how to read and that the children would be taught at school "the proper way". The mother added that in the playschool they suggested that if the children show an interest in reading or printing the parents should capitalize on the interest but that they should not consciously attempt to teach reading in a structured atmosphere. The mother when asked if the playschool teacher had specified any prereading activities, said they were encouraged to read to the children and again respond to any questions and encourage their interests in printing but that they should not be forced in any way as this was perceived to be harmful with respect to later reading.

The point parents made about encouraging interests is vital. It appears parents of high reading achievers were sensitive to the learning needs of their children. Parents may themselves have stimulated the children's emerging interest, as a result of the parents' own abiding interest in reading.

Stewart's mother expressed the notion that she did not feel qualified to teach reading and that because of differing methods of teaching reading, she may have done more harm than good if she had provided reading instruction. She did add that reading to the children and providing assistance when the child requested it was of utmost importance.

Parents of high reading achievers indicated they restricted their children's television viewing. Usually viewing time was limited although some also remarked there were programs they did not allow their children to watch because of the poor quality or the violent nature of some programs. The parents thought their children regulated their own viewing and certainly did not preoccupy themselves with watching television. Beth's mother remarked that her daughter had to do homework before watching television but commented, "She knows; she doesn't really care". Connie's mother mentioned that in preference to watching television her daughter would play outside. She also added that her daughter was busy with Brownies, piano lessons and general

play and that she seldom watched television. Samuel's father said, "they're their own best censor", and added that his children often began watching programs he thought they might find entertaining, such as scary shows, but they "drifted away and went upstairs". For these children, television did not seem to have a great deal to offer.

Reading Habits and Attitudes of Children

Similar to parent questioning, children in both high and low reading achievement groups were asked about their parents and personal involvement in reading and television viewing. To reinforce their responses regarding attitudes toward reading, the children were asked to select material they would be interested in reading from a variety of books presented to them.

Low Reading Achievers

The children were asked about rules restricting television viewing. Four of the children mentioned restrictions on television viewing in their homes and one child did not know of any restrictions. Eric said that he watches television only when his mother allows him to. When asked why he thought she had restrictions, Eric remarked that she wanted to watch shows also. Jeff agreed with his parents that he could watch as much television as he pleased.

The children were asked why they read. Three said

it was fun, Nina said her mother suggests that she read to get into higher grades, Jeff thought he learned things and Eric said sometimes he gets bored with watching television and playing outside so his mother asks him to read to her.

In response to the question "What do your parents read?", the children thought their fathers read mainly newspapers and Eric added that his father also reads "happy books" in which "nothing happens". The mothers were said to read a variety of books described as: funny, fat, hard and love books as well as books about Canada, nature, magazines and comic books.

The children were asked why they thought their parents read. Jeff and Deanne mentioned it was to be aware of events occurring locally and internationally. Nina said her mother enjoys reading, although her mother did not express this interest. Jeff said it gave them practice in saying words and mentioned it was a peaceful, quiet time. The remark was significant in that his parents mentioned the boy was easily distracted by noise in school. Nina explained that her parents had learned to read in school and wanted to help their children. Eric felt his parents read if they were bored or couldn't watch television.

When asked why they thought other people read, Jeff and Deanne mentioned being aware of news events and Nicholas said it was "just for fun". Eric said people read to learn more words and also postulated they read if no one was home or

while they were suntanning. Nina said:

They can read stories and it will be better for them and then they know how to read some of the books that the kids bring home.

High Reading Achievers

The children were asked whether their parents restricted their television viewing. Usually the amount of viewing time was mentioned and one said they could not eat while watching television. When asked if they learned anything from watching television, the children agreed that it was mostly for entertainment. Samuel said he might learn "one or two things a year" from watching television.

Children gave varied responses when questioned about why they read. Three mentioned that they read for fun. Connie said her hobby was reading. She and Stewart thought reading was good for their eyesight, since it exercises the eyes. Samuel read to learn words. Carl added "it makes you happy", and Samuel said:

I hear all these good things about the stories from my brother so I just go and read them.

All of the children said their parents did read in the home. The mothers were said to read a variety of books, adventure stories, romances, informational books as well as newspapers and magazines. Fathers most often were said to read newspapers, as well as books. Beth mentioned her father

was a student and read University books. Most children thought their parents read for enjoyment, one said "to have fun too". One said "because they might be interested"; another thought they like to find out about happenings. Stewart thought they read to "exercise their eyes and to keep knowing how to read".

When asked why they thought people in general read similar responses were given as for their parents. Three said "for fun", two others said maybe they like reading or it's their hobby and three mentioned it was to learn things or find things out. The comments of two children are of particular interest. Stewart stated people read:

Because sometimes it can be a hobby and they like to read so they can keep knowing how to read and to exercise their eyes; the more you read the better your eyes get and now I can see pretty well in the dark, by eating carrots and reading.

Samuel thought people read:

Probably because it improves them and their brains so they know new words everyday. I learn new words, maybe two or three every week because I don't read very many books in school that I don't know, that I haven't already read.

This is significant because this child was said to have superior vocabulary and particularly because it may indicate some inflexibility in reading instruction.

Book Selection

In one question the interviewer displayed 11 books of the following general types. All of the books were animal or bird stories. The children were asked to choose two books that they would like to read and they were asked to tell why they would like to be able to read that book:

1. Picture story book - color cover
 - soft cover - Bill and Pete
Wheel on the Chimney
 - hard cover - Benjy and the Barking Bird
The Grouchy Ladybug
The Monkey in the Rocket
2. Picture story book - plain cover
 - hard cover - Slip! Slop! Gobble!
3. No pictures
 - soft cover - Boy Who Has a Horse
4. A reader
 - Heads and Tails (Nelson) Grade 2
5. Informational books
 - soft cover - Charlie Brown's Super Book of Questions and Answers
 - hard cover - Some of us Walk. Some Fly. Some Swim.
About Animals (Childcraft)

Low Reading Achievers

When asked which books they would like to be able to read there was a variety of responses. Five chose hard cover picture books and three chose the soft cover informational Charlie Brown books likely because of the appeal of the cartoon characters. Two children chose the reader. One child chose the hard cover informational Childcraft book and as he leafed through the books identified pictures of animals.

Their reasons for specific book choices indicated their interest in the physical appearance of the book, although two also referred to the story or information the book might contain. Three indicated the books were colorful or they like the pictures. Three mentioned they liked learning or reading about animals or birds. Two chose books they considered to be easy to read that had "not so many words". One mentioned The Monkey in the Rocket was a strange title and that interested her and another thought the character Snoopy in the Charlie Brown book was a humorous character as he sleeps on top of a doghouse. Again they identified with the characters they were already familiar with.

High Reading Achievers

As with the low reading achievers, each child was asked to select two books from the 11 mentioned earlier. As a rule they examined the books carefully. Connie chose

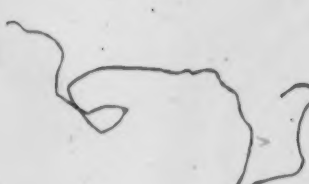
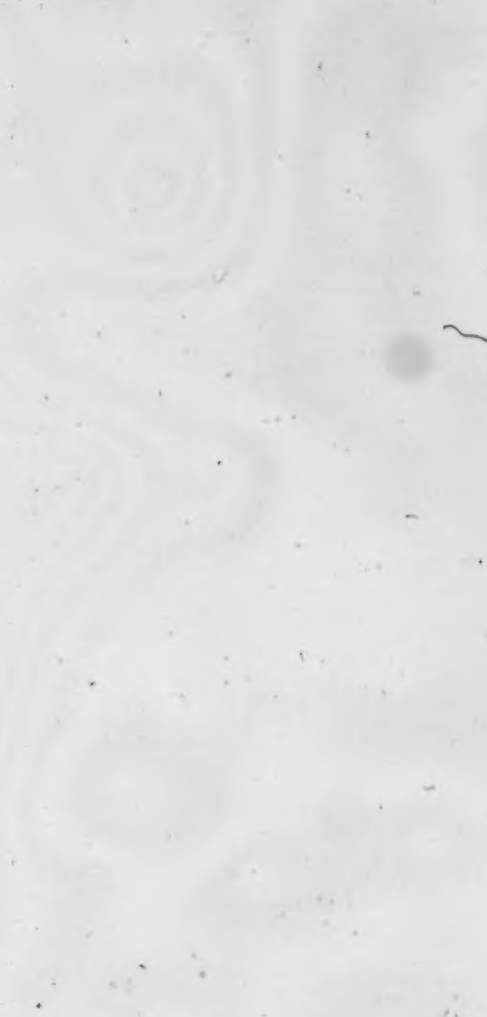
to read part of a hard cover picture book to the interviewer. Four children chose hard cover picture books, three selected soft cover informational books, three chose soft cover picture books, one chose the plain covered picture book and one chose the hard cover informational book. The reasons for these choices were noticeably different from the low reading achievement group.

When asked to explain their choices, most mentioned the contents rather than the physical appearance, in fact, only one child mentioned the pages were colorful. Many said the stories would be funny, others thought they might be interesting, ("it sounds interesting and it looks interesting too"), and another thought the title sounded strange, ("it's strange for a bird to bark"). One girl voluntarily explained what she thought one story might be about. Three mentioned they could learn about animals and one said she enjoyed animals. The child who chose the hard cover informational book did so because it reminded him of the Dr. Seuss books he used to read when he was younger.

Summary

The parents' and children's descriptions of the interactions indicates that children have had a variety of experiences before Grade One. Upon analysis of the data, certain commonalities were evident across all the children.

However, significant difference patterns between high and low reading achievers also emerged. The following chapter highlights some of the patterns.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

It was the intent of the present study to examine home environmental experiences related to reading, specifically probing parent-child interactional patterns. Children of low and high reading achievement levels currently enrolled in Grade Two and their parents were interviewed on topics of general experiences, circumstances and experiences related to home environments, shared parent-child reading experiences and reading attitudes and habits. Through analysis of the interview data it was possible to identify similarities as well as patterns of differences.

It is clear that the environment plays a crucial role in stimulating and providing experiences relevant to the child's interests and abilities and in encouraging these interests. The breadth of data may provide indicators which could be the foundations for later research with larger samples.

General Experiences

During the parent interviews, which were quite

informal, much valuable information was provided regarding the experiences and attitudes of the children, the home environment and the role the parents assumed in supporting formal education. At the beginning of the interviews, parents were encouraged to describe the behavior of their children, comment about their learning style and those characteristics which might have affected learning in the regular classroom.

Parents were questioned about possible individual communication with teachers at the beginning of their child's school career. They would have liked the teachers to be aware of the individual character of the children and some parents in both groups pointed out their individuality by comparing the child with an older or younger sibling. Immaturity was the basis for comparison of two low reading achievers. One high reading achiever was said to read less than an older brother had and another was perceived to be well-prepared to enter first grade. Perhaps one major difference noted is that parents of low reading achievers most often suggested more negative aspects of their child's personality (high strung, excitable, immature) than did the parents of high reading achievers (sensitive, outgoing, active, aggressive, talkative) or perhaps they perceived the child's character differently.

Low Reading Achievers

Only three of the six low reading achievers had attended playschool. Their parents perceived socialization to be the primary benefit of such group experiences as playschool and kindergarten.

The low reading achievement group were much less involved in reading and writing activities than were high reading achievers and most remarked they are still not interested in reading. Those who mentioned they do read, indicated a limited amount of reading and would choose other activities in preference to reading.

Before going to school all children in the low group could read at least some letters of the alphabet, however only two could read simple words and none were said to be reading material at the story or book level.

High Reading Achievers

Although only half of the low reading achievers had attended playschool, all of the high reading achievers had playschool experiences. Parents of high reading achievers also mentioned the social benefits of playschool but also perceived their children to be prepared for more advanced group activities. Similarly parents of the high reading achievers mentioned the readiness training provided by the kindergarten.

On the basis of interest in print material, it was evident that a definite distinction could be made between the low and high reading achievement groups. In contrast to the low group, the high reading achievers enjoyed books and utilized books, magazines and printed material extensively and in various ways when they were younger and continue to read on their own.

Prior to going to school the high reading achievers could recognize letters of the alphabet and five were said to be reading words. The high group were somewhat more advanced as some mentioned book-reading as well. Parents of high reading achievers stated they thought educational programming such as Sesame Street and Electric Company had an important impact on their children's learning the alphabet and words and they added the children were easily absorbed by the programs.

Circumstances Related to Home Environment

In this section questioning related to children's exposure to books within the home and through library attendance. All children in both groups had a variety of books available to them in the home.

Low Reading Achievers

Parents and relatives of the low reading achievers selected books purchased for the children as they did not

feel their children capable of making appropriate choices. None of these children had been taken to the library on a regular basis. Five of the six children had never attended the local library.

High Reading Achievers

Encouragement of independence in book selection was a feature found only in the high reading achievement group. Parents mentioned assistance in book choice with the aim of having the child choose suitable books for himself. The children were encouraged to choose their own books, whether purchased or borrowed from the public library, to develop responsible book selection. The high reading group had considerable library exposure prior to school attendance and most continue to find it a source of information and enjoyment, although parents indicated less reliance on the services of the public library because of the large numbers of books in the home and the easy access to the school library.

Parent-child Interactions

As well as probing general parent-child shared experiences, further questioning sought to explore interactions related to the children's questions in general and about print specifically. Parents and children were questioned regarding the parents' roles in providing assistance

with reading.

When asked about shared activities, parents and children in both groups mentioned outdoor activities most often. An interesting note is that two of the high reading achievers indicated they enjoyed talking informally with their parents.

Low Reading Achievers

Parents of low reading achievers were less involved in supporting early interest in reading or in providing early experiences to encourage interest in reading. The parents seemed less involved than were parents of high reading achievers in explanations or other forms of assistance. Many explained that their children did not show an interest in printed material nor were they interested in the print in the environment (signs, labels on product packaging).

Most parents of low achievers thought that the child had been encouraged to read mostly in school and perceived their own assistance to be in making books available to the child and teaching the child to identify the letters of the alphabet. Several mentioned that they became involved once the child was in school as they perceived a problem with reading in relation to other children, or if relatives expressed concern with the child's inability to read or, if as in most cases, they had been asked specifically by the child's teacher to provide assistance.

The children mentioned how their parents helped them with spelling and saying or writing words so that they would know some words upon school entry. None of the low group felt they could learn to read if they never went to school. When questioned regarding assistance with reading in school, the low group mentioned "sounding out words", using sheets and cards with words and sentences on them, being told what words were and taking books home over the summer holidays.

High Reading Achievers

As a group the high reading achievers were very inquisitive and were aware of print in their environment and at an early age were said to be questioning various forms of print. Parents remarked that they did their best to provide explanations and reasons for their responses and in one case the child's advanced vocabulary was noted. Children were also said to be persistent in gaining responses to their questions and older siblings were said to have profound influences on their younger siblings. As a result of the children's questions, parents indicated that they were involved in considerable explanation and the interactions appeared to take place in a positive climate. The parents appeared to be sensitive to the needs of their children and provided various learning experiences in relation to reading as well as other general experiences. The parents encouraged

questions by the nature of their responses.

Parents of high reading achievers indicated they would respond to the child's questions about words and letters on packages and labels as well as in books. They appeared to be sensitive to the needs of their children and thought they might have encouraged the child's reading by reading to them and thus stimulating an interest in reading. They also recalled providing explanations about aspects of reading as well as general information, reading themselves and providing a model and exposing the children to library settings. They also indicated books had been made readily available and those children with older siblings also were thought to have an advantage. In one instance a grandmother who lived with the family was an important influence. Clearly these families both stimulated and encouraged learning and the children had available to them an interested adult who provided important explanations and responses.

Half of the high reading achievers felt they had learned the most about reading at home and all saw school as an extension of what they had learned at home. They recalled that they had been given assistance with unknown words and again mentioned this was in readiness for school. Advancement of reading ability and enjoyment of reading were also mentioned as reasons for assistance.

The students in the high reading achievement group who regarded the school as the most influential factor in

their learning to read, described the method of reading instruction in school in terms of: being told words they could not say, learning to remember words and one child recalled how he learned that the "secret of reading" was to pronounce words. Further studies examining methods of reading instruction and comparing children's perceptions of reading instruction could be beneficial.

Shared Book Experiences

Parents and children were questioned about their involvement in sharing stories and books.

Low Reading Achievers

Only three parents of low reading achievers read to their children prior to school. The others were said to be uninterested in being read to. Some low reading achievers displayed negative attitudes toward reading. Those who were read to said they enjoyed it but they were not actively involved in the reading nor were they questioning print a great deal. As one parent explained, it was a form of entertainment but this did not appear to assist them in their own reading. The children in the low group most often focused on the pictures and limited parent explanation was involved. The children did not appear to be interested in being read to now.

High Reading Achievers

One of the crucial differences between the high and low reading achiever's families is the amount of reading done by parents. All of the high reading achievers had been read to extensively. They came from homes where parents and siblings willingly shared books with them on a regular basis. The children found it a pleasurable experience and were actively involved in turning pages, pointing, asking for books to be reread and memorizing stories. Also the children were said to question the story and the pictures as well as the words and the letters.

Parents of high reading achievers were also actively involved in and encouraged the children's involvement in the reading process by responding to their questions, pointing to words and by reviewing sections as requested by the child. Parents themselves generated positive feelings about the reading situation and this could be an important factor in the children's success in reading. Four of the six high reading achievers were still read to. Because all of the children in the high group memorized stories and appeared to read silently from an early age, it made it difficult for parents to suggest exactly when the child began to read or when the interest in letters or words was first shown. For low reading achievers, this interest was not evident until the child was in school.

The children in the high group pointed out that they liked the way in which the parents read and also mentioned the willingness of the parents in providing assistance, especially reading to them. One child sums up by recounting a specific instance and some important emotions:

I have a big Star Wars book and I asked her (his mother) to read it to me and it took her almost two and a half hours to read it because it's a very long book ... she reads to me when I want her to ... I like her, she's a very nice parent.

It can be assumed that this sensitivity to the child's interests and questions profoundly affected attitudes toward reading.

Reading Habits and Attitudes of Parents

As well as probing general reading habits and attitudes regarding the importance of reading, parents were asked if they felt children should be given preschool assistance with reading.

Mothers in both groups and fathers in the high group read to some extent in the home. In both groups reading was regarded as an important skill and the high reading group's parents valued the enjoyment they derived from reading and wanted their children to have the same interest and enjoyment in reading. Parents of low reading achievers were more willing to accept alternate sources of receiving

information but parents of high reading achievers saw reading as having a special significance that could not be provided for by any other means. Parents of the low group did not feel qualified to teach reading and mentioned this depended upon the maturity of the child. Although parents of the high group expressed similar thoughts about being unqualified to teach reading, they also explained that there were a wealth of prereading activities such as responding to questions and reading to the child as well as exposing the child to various other activities, they could be involved with. Few parents in either group consciously attempted to teach their child reading in any formal way.

Reading Habits and Attitudes of Children

The children were also questioned about their interest in reading and through selection of books displayed by the researcher demonstrated their attitudes toward reading.

As compared to the high group, the low reading achievers did not appear to perceive reading as an information-gaining process nor did they often perceive the enjoyment aspects of reading. The high group was generally more independent in book selection and television viewing with independence and responsibility being fostered by the parents. The high reading achievers viewed reading as a pleasurable experience and had an advanced concept of reading. They also

had positive attitudes toward reading instruction and felt siblings and parents played an important role in teaching them to read.

Conclusions

Difference patterns between high and low reading groups indicate that an outstanding feature of the home environments of successful readers was the active involvement of parents and children in such areas as questioning and responding, book selection and shared book experiences with the following aims: to foster independence in book selection, to foster interest in reading, broaden the child's knowledge base, and stimulate interest shown by the child.

Perhaps because parents were less involved in providing early experiences with reading and in encouraging the children's interest in reading, the low reading achievement group were far less interested in print. But whether interest had not developed in the children due to natural maturity or whether the interest was not encouraged is not clear. It is important to note that two of the low reading achievers were said to display an early interest in words and letters but the interest had not continued. Would the interest have persisted if it had been encouraged?

None of the low group felt they could have learned to read if they never went to school. They may not have perceived their parents as playing an important role in

teaching reading or prereading skills. Some parents recalled that they had been requested to provide assistance with reading once the child had began formal schooling. At this point if the parents were not themselves interested, imposing reading on the child may have been counter-productive. If the parents perceived this as an unpleasant task or were unsure of how to provide assistance, it may have provided a negative climate and contributed to the children's attitude regarding reading.

It is clear that most children in this study entered school with an extensive background of experience and knowledge. Playschool may have had an important role as all of the high reading achievers had attended playschool. However, before going to kindergarten only half of the low reading achievers had any such group experiences. Playschool and certainly kindergarten experiences were seen to be productive by some parents beyond the socialization of younger children in providing advanced readiness activities. Prior to playschool and in some cases prior to kindergarten, children had spent most of their time in the home environment. Presumably this had an important influence on the children. Of importance is the necessity of linking home experiences to kindergarten and playschool experience to extend rather than repeat existing knowledge. Parent involvement in providing reading and other experiences can enhance the child's interest in and opportunity for success in reading

as well as encourage positive reading attitudes. However, some parents in both groups were apprehensive about becoming involved in teaching their child to read. Many did not feel adequately prepared and some clearly did not consider the importance of their roles as educators. One father of a low reading achiever, when asked if there was anything they might have done at home to encourage the child's interest in reading replied, "We were kind of thinking that Sesame Street would look after that for us".

Three parents (two of high reading achievers, one of a low reading achieving child) were asked specifically if they saw any value in making programs available to parents, providing them with information regarding possible activities, materials and approaches. All three considered programs of this sort to be desirable. The parent of the low reading achieving child commented that perhaps we leave too much to the schools and that once the child begins attending school, that ends most parents' involvement. She said that personally she would like to see more of this type of assistance coming from the schools. The mother of a high reading achiever who had herself recently completed reading courses at the University said she recognized things now that she never realized she should do. Another mother recognized there was a need for programs which provided parents with direction and recounted that when she had gone to assist at the kindergarten "there were so many things that I noticed and so many

things that I was aware of that previously it just never entered my mind ... When I think back there was an awful lot of things I could have done differently". She added that such courses should provide only guidelines as some parents might resent being told what they should do.

As this study pointed out, parents of high reading achievers displayed a considerable amount of rich interaction in a positive atmosphere and provided reading activities that may have extended the children's interests. Above all parents must create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Explanations to the child's questions spur further questions and further learning. The parents must be sensitive to the needs of the child and provide a variety of learning experiences in relation to reading as well as general knowledge. This will help significantly in creating a genuine interest in reading and in promoting positive attitudes toward reading.

Parents of several low reading achievers recalled alphabet identification as a major form of assistance or encouragement that they provided. Letter-naming is only one of several kinds of concepts and skills about reading which children are acquiring and home assistance which concentrates on letter recognition as the critical reading readiness skill has a narrow focus. Other skills including language production, listening, visual and auditory discrimination and small motor coordination are also crucial.

From the information gathered in the present study it is clear that the simple criterion of availability of printed material in the home is inadequate, as all homes had considerable amounts. For some children initial interest was in print in the environment rather than specific books. Awareness of environmental print could also sensitize children to print in a meaningful context.

As parents perceived older siblings provided motivation, modelling and were involved in direct assistance with reading, birth order may be an important factor influencing the success of some of the children in the study. Family size ranged from one to three children but most of the families studied had two children. Four of the low reading achievers were oldest children. Another child had a sister four years older. Four of the high reading achievers were youngest children; with three the next oldest child was two years older and with the other child the sibling was three years older. It appears that a narrower gap between the ages may also be a factor.

Although it is difficult to generalize and certainly having older siblings is not a prerequisite to success in reading, it does appear that having older brothers or sisters who read and play school, plays an important part in the successes of several of the children and parents mentioned this voluntarily in their responses. One mother described this interaction as an "Open Sesame" and speculated that a

child can communicate with another child far more easily than with adults. The situation in which there was an older sibling might have also been important in that parents had predetermined expectations for their children.

Recommendations

1. Encouraging Parent-child Interactions

The attitude of assisting children with experiences related to reading prior to school should be encouraged. As was suggested, many of the parents in the present study in both high and low achievement groups did not consider the impact of their contributions to their children's progress. The idea expressed by many parents (as well as some teachers) in both groups that in school children would be taught to read "the proper way", needs to be re-examined. Since children do spend many hours with parents and siblings it would be beneficial if they could learn elements of reading at home from their families. However, parents did not feel qualified or were unsure of teaching methods. A most important comment by a mother of a low reading achieving child was that she had not even thought of taking a preschool child to the library. Educators must work towards providing parents of young children with possible guidelines, advising them of activities they can share with their children, making them aware of reading materials which would benefit their children as well as explaining teaching approaches. Linking

the home and school environments by such schemes would increase the likelihood of a more rewarding experience with respect to reading for children as well as parents.

Parents should be encouraged and assisted in providing support for a child's developing interest in reading. Furthermore they must realize they are capable of having a profound influence on the child's reading attitudes and ultimately his reading achievement. To assist parents, comprehensive programs linking the home and school which provide parents with information outlining possible activities could promote success in reading in their children.

Continued parent-teacher conferences once the child was enrolled in school would be productive. In the Right to Read bulletin mentioned earlier, Patricia Koppman speaks of the responsibility educators have to parents:

As parents of older children become concerned about their children's progress in school, they realize that they, the parents, have to assume some responsibility in the educational process. However, we as school people also have a responsibility to parents. If we want parents to become involved, we need to provide them with guidelines and suggestions for encouraging their children's learning. Then I believe parents will help. (1978, p. 8)

Initially parents could provide motivation for communication by responding to the child's questions and providing explanations and experiences to increase the child's general knowledge. Parents could interpret print in the environment (signs, labels, cereal boxes, words on television) for the child. Parents could also encourage interest in all

print forms by initiating games with road signs and encouraging interest in words and letters in the environment.

Beyond making books available to the children, they should be read to often from an early age, much before the child is of school age to make them aware of the features of book language. Through this exposure children could develop an interest and desire to learn about print for the sheer enjoyment of learning as Schickedanz (1978) suggests in her cognitive model of story reading. Related to shared book experiences the following guidelines could be suggested:

- a. Children should be actively involved in choosing their own books and other print material including magazines. They should also be allowed to choose a considerable number of the stories that are read to them. When the child is quite young, a combined choice involving parental guidance, perhaps in a library setting, in terms of level of difficulty and appropriateness would be advisable with the aim being to allow the child to make responsible independent choices.
- b. Rereading of familiar stories should be encouraged.
- c. Children should be encouraged to read along and memorize parts of stories or whole stories as they follow along. Rather than exact memorization, an approximation in early stages will serve to introduce letter-sound relationships. At later stages the shared book experience will be a source of data from which children can construct knowledge about the reading process.

d. To make the child aware of print in books and to assist them in following along, parents should be involved in pointing to the print and relating pictures to the print. The child could also be involved in pointing.

e. The child should be allowed to turn the pages in books as the story is read to him/her to help understand the phrasing of the story and become aware of the relationship between print and pictures.

f. Children should be encouraged to question print in books and in various other forms in the environment. This can be encouraged by the nature and form of the responses. A willingness to provide adequate responses is vital. Explanations by parents in response to the child's questioning and in areas the child has an interest or a lack of understanding are crucial.

g. To make the child actively involved in the story-reading he should be encouraged to predict events in stories. It may be desirable to review parts of stories as necessary.

h. As some children recalled they enjoyed the way in which their parents read, parents could read stories with emphasis and feeling. One parent recalled how he often pantomimed the story.

i. Parents should provide a model by reading themselves on a regular basis for information and enjoyment from a variety of print forms including books and magazines. The value of reading could also be communicated directly.

As in studies of language development, this study suggests that an actively responding parent directing learning in a positive environment is a crucial factor in the child's success in reading. The teaching of reading should not be on the basis of conscious formal instruction. Reading instruction must not become the end but rather the means toward subsequent enjoyment of reading.

An important focus of parent-school programs would be the encouragement of parents to interact in a positive atmosphere with their children and to appreciate the valuable contributions they are making or are capable of making. Parents have a significant role in preparing their children to read and can assist in strengthening and extending the school's program. Parents could have an even more direct role by acting as tutors in the school program. It is clear that both the school personnel and the children would benefit from programs that convinced parents that they can have a powerful influence on their children's reading ability and also gave parents the encouragement and reassurance that they can cultivate an interest in reading and influence reading ability.

2. School Reading Programs

School reading programs could seek to restore regular reading aloud by the teacher. Students could benefit from being read to on a regular basis to extend home shared book experiences. Exposure to a variety of books rich in language

could assist in the child's development of reading.

Because of the varying abilities of students in early childhood programs, there is a need for flexibility and challenge to accommodate such a wide range of abilities. One child in particular said he does not read many books in school that he has not already read. For this child, and likely for others at the extreme levels of ability, the standard group reading instruction is not fulfilling their needs as it is not based on their individual abilities and background of experiences. Clearly a more eclectic approach without heavy reliance on a formal reading text and with considerable student choice in book selection is desirable. The school must appreciate the skills the child brings to the reading task and must be sensitive to the varying interests and abilities of the children and not necessarily rely on prescribed reading texts. This substantiates Durkin's (1974-75) observation that school programs must build on rather than repeat what some children already know. It would be advisable for teachers to base instruction on the abilities of children and not force children through the same instructional sequence causing those who come to school already proficient at reading to become frustrated.

Although children may not be able to read as they enter Grade One or do not perform well on readiness tests some may have a considerable background of experiences related to reading as well as other experiences that make reading a

much easier task for them and put them at an obvious advantage. Some reading readiness tests at best measure a limited number of skills. Cognitive learning style and experiential background are important factors which are often not measured. In terms of reading readiness measurement it is valuable to assess more than maturation alone. It is crucial that readiness testing take into account the environmental background of the child in terms of experiences and attitudes as a result of parent-child interactions with reading.

3. Library Exposure

Because of the importance of library exposure as seen in the high reading achievement group, it may be advantageous for school programs to suggest library attendance and combined book choices initially with the goal being that the child be involved in responsible, independent book selection. Libraries could serve to support the developing interests of children whose families cannot provide this assistance. Local libraries themselves could attract early readers and their parents with the story hours being the obvious starting point. Parents could be encouraged to play an active role in stimulating the children's interests through libraries thus encouraging parent-child interactions. School and public libraries could also be closer linked to provide classroom resources. Lending services could be provided to children at the playschool level.

Suggestions for Further Research

Although many studies focus on capable preschool readers, it appears from this study that in terms of home environment a wider range of study may be necessary. Many of the high reading achievers could not read extensively prior to school because the parents did not provide formal reading instruction. However, the children had a variety of experiences that probably made it easier for the children to learn to read in school. Although time does not always allow it, longitudinal studies carrying through a period of several years observing early interactional patterns and relating this to student achievement would likely prove to be fruitful.

Longitudinal studies could better deal with the question of whether or not success can be created in pre-readers. Research is needed to relate attitudes and later success or difficulty in reading.

Further studies of a similar nature could seek to substantiate parent responses by directly questioning children on information provided in the parent interviews. For example, if parents described specific aspects of the shared book experience, children's questions could be directed to the specific parent responses.

Another possible study could focus on the influence of playschool experiences on success in reading. What is

the effect of attendance in a playschool or kindergarten depending on the length of time the children have been in attendance?

Further studies could compare low and high reading achievers' perceptions of reading instruction in school as compared to the home to examine whether functions of reading in the two settings are perceived differently. Also perceptions of children in different schools could be compared.

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APPENDIX

PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

By talking to parents of children in the second grade, I hope to understand children better, specifically I feel teachers and school personnel need to know more about the interests and abilities children come to school with. Perhaps we're assuming too much or too little. In either case, many people feel that the experiences of living in a family are important. Also the study is exploratory; I am not suggesting things that should have or should not have been done.

Will you tell me some of the things you would have liked _____'s teacher to know about him before he entered Grade One?

Did he attend playschool?

How long?

Where?

Reason for sending?

Did he attend kindergarten?

How long?

Where?

Reason for sending?

Kind of program in the playschool and kindergarten.

What did the children do?

Did they have any books? What kind?

Did anyone read to them? Who? How often?

Did anyone try to teach them to read? Who? How?

Play in the years before first grade.

Did he usually play with children his own age, older children, younger children, mixed groups?

What did he play?

What kind of playthings or toys did he like best?

Did he ever use books, magazines, paper and pencil in his play? How?

What was he most interested in before going to school?

What activities did you share together as a family?

Did he ask many questions when he was younger?

About what?

How did you respond to these questions?

Did he ever pay attention to the signs on road, stores or restaurants?

Did he ever ask questions about words, letters or numbers that he saw on cans, labels or packages?

Did anyone try to teach him to recognize any of the words on these?

Who?

How?

Why?

At what age did your son/daughter first show an interest in written words or numbers?

What do you think might have encouraged him to read?

How did he first start to read?

Did you or anyone else give the child preschool help with reading?

Within the family or outside, what did people do to help your child to read?

What materials were used by each of these people?

Why were these various kinds of help given?

Of these people who was the one who seemed to teach your child the most about reading?

Did you ever buy books for the child to read?
What kind?

Did you often suggest books he would enjoy or did he enjoy choosing his own?

Did you take him to the library?
If so, when did you first take him?
How often did you go?
Does he still go to the library?

Did anyone read to your child?
Who?
What kinds of books?
When did you read to him?
Do you feel this relates to later reading? How?
Did he ask to be read to?
Did he enjoy it?
Is he still read to?
Does he still enjoy it?
Does he ever read to you?

Who selected the book for reading?

What kind of books were they?

How frequently were the same books selected for reading?

When you (or someone else) read to the child was the child able to see the pictures and the print?

Did the person reading to him just read along through the story or stop at any point for any purpose?

Make explanations as he went along?

Ask any questions as he went along?

Was there any introductory discussion prior to reading?
After reading?

Why was this done?

Was there any review or rereading of selected parts?
Why was this done?

Did the child appear to focus his attention on the pictures, the print or the reader?

Did the child usually just listen?

Was he encouraged to follow along as the reader read?

Did he help to turn the pages?

If so, was it synchronized with the story?

Did he ask questions about the story, the pictures, the words or the letters?

Did the child or the reader engage in any pointing at the print or the pictures during the reading?
Why was this done?

Did he memorize stories or parts of stories and "read along" with the story?

Did he relate words to pictures?

Did the child ever pretend he was reading?

How often?

What did he like to "read"?

Does he read much on his own now?

Does he enjoy reading?

In his own reading what does he do if he comes to a word he doesn't know?

Before he entered first grade did he ever try to write or print?

When he entered first grade was he able to recognize his name?

Could he write his own name?

When he entered first grade could he recognize letters?

What words could he recognize?

Could he read books, stories?

What kind?

How did he react to going to school?

If the child has older brothers and sisters, how did his reaction to first grade differ from theirs?

How do you account for this difference?

What does he like about school?

What does he do after school?

Does he ever bring books home from school?

PARENT READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES

How much reading do you do at home?

At home what kinds of reading material does the father/
mother read?

Is reading important to you?

Why do you read at home?

Is reading important in general in this day and age?

Will it remain important?

Will the increased use of television and computers
affect this?

Do you think parents should give help with things like read-
ing to preschool children?

Are there any rules for reading books in the home?

If so what are they?

Are there any books you do not permit the child to read?

Are there limits set on how often the child reads, the
time spent on reading or the numbers of books that
can be read?

Why do you have these rules?

Do you have any rules for watching television?

Why do you have these rules?

Do you have a special time during the day or week when you
and your child share stories, tell stories, when you
read to him or her or when you just talk?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SUBJECT: Name
 Birthdate

FATHER: Occupation
 Training

MOTHER: Occupation
 Training

OTHER ADULTS IN THE HOME:

 Name
 Occupation
 Relationship to the child

OTHER CHILDREN:	Name	Age	Grade in School
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How long have you lived in this community?

Where did you live before?

Prior to moving here did you move alot?

CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

What kinds of things do you usually do:
right after supper?
in the evenings?
on Saturday?
on Sunday?

Do you watch T.V.?
What do you watch?
Why do you watch T.V.?
What do you learn from watching T.V.?
Do you have any rules for watching T.V. at home?

When you have some time at home when you can do whatever you want to do, what do you like to do?

Who do you usually play with?
What do you play?
What do you play with?

What things do you like to do with your parents?

Do you like to have someone read to you?
Who?
What do you like them to read?
Do you ever read to your parents?

Were you read to when you were younger?
Who read?
What did you like to have read to you?
Did they read as much as you would like?
Why do/don't you like to be read to?
Why do you think they read to you?

Could you read before you came to school?
What could you read?

Do you like to read at home?
What do you like to read?
When do you usually read?
Why do you like to read at home?

Do you read quite a bit in school?
Do you like to read at school?
What do you like to read in school?
Why do you like to read in school?
Why do you think you read in school?

What kinds of books do you like to read?

Why do you read?

Which one of these books would you like to be able to read?
Why?

Who taught you to read?
How did they teach you?

Did anyone help you learn to read before you came to school?
Who?
How did they help you?
Why did they help you?

Could you learn to read if you never went to school?

Do your parents read at home?
What do they read?
Why do they read?

Why do people read?